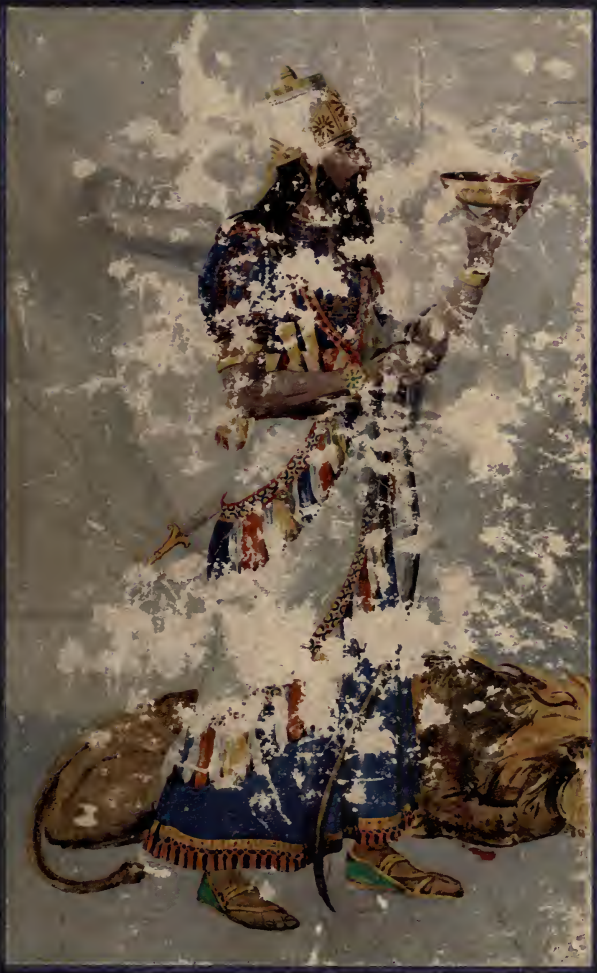
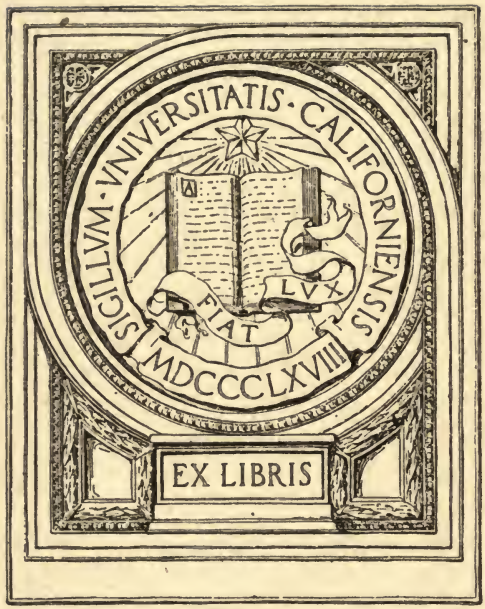
PEEPS AT MANY LANDS



ANCIENT ASSYRIA


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MARDUK CONQUERS TIAMAT. (Page 83)

PEEPS AT MANY LANDS

ANCIENT ASSYRIA

BY

REV. JAMES BAIKIE, F.R.A.S.

AUTHOR OF "PEEPS AT ANCIENT EGYPT," "PEEPS AT THE HEAVENS," "THE STORY OF THE PHARAOHS," ETC.

WITH SIXTEEN FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

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SKETCH-MAP OF ASSYRIA.

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ANCIENT ASSYRIA

CHAPTER I

THE CRADLE OF MANKIND

At the beginning of all things, when the world was new, and men were finding out bit by bit what they could do and how to do it, there were two countries that were more important than any others. They were both the valleys of great rivers, and it was the rivers that made them what they were. The one country was Egypt—that wonderful land where the Nile comes rolling down from the Great Lake Basin of equatorial Africa, and flows for hundreds of miles between temples and pyramids erected by the greatest builders the world has ever seen. About Egypt, two of these little books have already told you.*

The other country was known by several different names. There were really two kingdoms in it—Babylonia and Assyria; but the name that was given to the whole country by all the other nations of the world, though it sounded different in the various languages, always meant the same thing. If it was a Greek who spoke, he said "Mesopotamia"; if it was an Egyptian, he said "Naharina"; if it was a Hebrew, he said "Naharaim": but they all meant "Between

* Peeps at Many Lands: "Ancient Egypt," by J. Baikie; "Egypt," by R. Talbot Kelly.

the Two Rivers," or "The Land of the Two Rivers," for the great feature of the country was that it lay between two big rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, which come down from the mountains of Asia Minor, and flow south-east into the Persian Gulf.

If you will look at your map, you will see that almost from the north-eastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf there runs in a slanting direction a comparatively flat strip of country. It is rather hilly, or at least high upland country, at its upper end near the Mediterranean; but it grows flatter and flatter the further you go east, till, near the Persian Gulf, it is as flat almost as a table. On the one side of this land rise the great mountain ranges that form the outer wall of Kurdistan and Persia, huge forbidding hills, with only a few wild and narrow passes leading up into their solitary fastnesses; on the other side, the great desert rolls away towards Damascus and Arabia, wave after wave, mile upon mile, of barren sand and shingle. But the land between, wretched and poverty-stricken as it looks now, was once the Garden of the World, the place where men first learned to be men and not brutes, and where the two great rivers, as they rolled on towards the sea, reflected the walls and towers and temples of many of the oldest and greatest cities that the world has ever known. Egypt is the only other land that can claim to have a story which goes back as far as that of the country about which we are thinking.

Far away up in the mountains of Asia Minor there lies a little mere or lake called Gioljik, and here the more northerly of the two rivers of the land, the Tigris, takes its rise. It flows almost straight for the sea, running so swiftly all along its course that the people

of the country call it "Dijla" ("The Arrow"), and cutting for itself a deep trench below the level of the plain. The other river, the Euphrates, rises among the hills still further north and east than the Tigris, and heads at first straight for the Mediterranean, as though it meant to cut through the narrow neck of land which keeps it from the middle sea. Changing its mind, however, it sweeps round in a great bend to a course roughly parallel with that of its sister stream, though a considerable distance south of it, and flows on towards the Persian Gulf much more deliberately and sluggishly than its northern neighbour.

The upper part of the land between the rivers is more or less hilly and bare; but gradually the slopes become less steep, and the land becomes a level plain, which, indeed, has been made by the mud and silt brought down by the two rivers. At a place called Kurna, in the plain, the two rivers unite, and the single stream, now called the Shatt-el-Arab, rolls slowly to the sea, past the dirty and unhealthy ports of Mohammerah and Basra. Many hundreds of years ago the plain did not extend nearly so far, for the sea came further inland. Mohammerah, which is now 47 miles inland, actually stood on the shore in the time of Alexander the Great; and we know that another place which is now 125 miles from the Gulf used to be a seaport. But that was more than 5,000 years ago, and every day since then the great rivers have been bringing down soil from the mountains, and laying it down in the plain, and so pushing the sea further back.

Now it was on this flat plain, between the uplands of the two rivers and the sea, that the cradle of mankind was first rocked, and that the infant human

race first opened its eyes and began to see what a wonderful place this world might be. Later, the uplands lying further up the rivers became important also, and, indeed, I shall have more to tell you about them than about the plain; but it was the plain that first became important. That was so long ago that you can scarcely imagine how long. In all likelihood that first settlement of men which the Bible describes as the Garden of Eden lay somewhere in the plain between the rivers; indeed, the Bible says that one of the rivers that watered it was the Euphrates. And it was here that men first began to build cities and towers and temples. One of their towers has become for ever famous because the Book of Genesis tells of it as the Tower of Babel; and when we hear that name we know pretty well where we are, for Babel and Babylon are the same name—the one is "The Gate of God," and the other "The Gate of the Gods and the Tower of Babel was, no doubt, the great temple-tower that the first builders of Babylon reared to the glory of their god.

Nowadays you would not think that there ever had been much of the garden about this country. It is wild and bare and desolate. Higher up the rivers especially, there are stretches which are gay and bright with greenery and wild flowers for a little while in early spring; but they quickly get parched and dry when summer comes; and the lower parts are all dotted over with swamps filled with the water which the rivers leave behind them after the annual floods—swamps where fever, and ague, and malaria breed continually. The only things that break the monotony of the great bare plains are a few unsightly heaps, very like the rubbish heaps that are piled up around

our coal-pits and shale-pits; and altogether you can scarcely imagine a more doleful or uninteresting looking country.

But all this was once very different. At every spot where there is now a mound, there once stood a great town, with its walls and palaces and temples, its busy market-places and its crowded streets; and the land between the towns was one of the richest soils in the world. A great Greek writer, called Herodotus, travelled all through these countries several hundred years before Christ, and has left the story of his journey. Among other things he says that he won't tell all that he saw, because people would never believe it, for never was there known such fruitfulness as that of Babylonia. But he says that the seed often yielded three hundred fold, and that the blades of corn were often three and even four fingers broad. To look upon the land now, you would think that Herodotus was only hoaxing you with traveller's tales; but we know that many other things he tells us are quite true, and so it is natural to suppose that he is telling the truth in this also. He describes, for instance, the funny old round leathern boats that the people used on the rivers; and not only can we see the same boats represented on their sculptures, but the folks actually use boats exactly like them on the rivers to this day. Besides, many other ancient writers confirm what Herodotus says about the fruitfulness of the country.

The reason of the difference between then and now is that in the old days the kings and governors used to take great pains to see that the floods of the rivers were regulated and used to water the land by means of canals. A king used to be as proud of the canals he had dug as of the conquests he had made. And

so, when the floods came down, the sluices of the canals were opened, and the flood-water was distributed through all the land, and used to water the dry parts instead of spreading itself uselessly over the low-lying ground. If the canal system had been kept up and looked after, the land to-day would be as rich as ever. But whenever the Turks got possession of the country, they neglected this, as they neglect everything useful, and all the wonderful canals of the old kings have long since gone to wreck and ruin. You can still see the beds where they ran, with the banks on either side stretching across the plain; indeed, the best roads to-day follow the beds of the old canals. But now the water is allowed to go to waste, or worse, to make the land into a sour swamp, and the whole country almost is desolate. Still, if wise and good governors were to get it into their hands once more, and were to remake the canals and keep them in proper working order, there is no doubt that this wonderful old land would be as good as ever again before long; and perhaps that may come to pass in our time too.

Now about the very earliest history of this country, the time when men were just beginning to become civilized, and were still using tools and weapons of stone, we cannot tell so much as we can tell about the same time in Egypt. For the land in Mesopotamia does not preserve the relics of the past so well as the dry sandy soil of Egypt does. Still, we can go back a very long way indeed. And we can see that what happened was something like this: A cluster of people would gather together for convenience and for safety, and gradually they would form a little town. Bit by bit the town would grow bigger. Strong walls would be reared to protect it, all built of brick, for there was

no good building stone in a country made of mud, like Babylonia, as there was in Egypt; and then would come a temple to the god who was supposed to watch over the town, and beside the temple rose a tall tower, built, just as a child builds a castle with wooden bricks, in stages, growing smaller and smaller as they went higher. And then the big man of the town, who was both king and priest, would require a big house to live in; and so by-and-by there grew up a palace beside the temple and its tower; and you had a city-state complete. Round its walls lay the fields which the citizens farmed, going out to their work in the morning when the gates were opened, and coming home again at sunset before the gates were shut; and beyond the ploughed fields lay a wider circle of pasture-land where the flocks of the townsfolk were driven out to pasture, and were watched over by shepherds and herdsmen. It was a little kingdom, quite compact and complete within itself.

But if you went up to the top of the temple-tower, and looked across the plain, you would see, far away on the horizon, the top of another tower, like the one you were standing on, gleaming in the sunlight. There was another city-state at the foot of that tower too; and by-and-by, as the two towns grew bigger and the circles of fields and pasture widened, the borders of the two states would meet, and then there was trouble. The herdsmen and shepherds quarrelled and fought, and somebody was killed. And then the citizens of the town that had lost a man took down their spears and helmets and big shields and went on the warpath against the other town. There was a battle, and the victorious side took possession of as much of the land of its enemy as it could hold. Or perhaps one town

conquered its neighbour altogether, and then went on conquering the other towns round about until it had made quite a little kingdom for itself. When that happened its priest-king gave himself no end of airs. He called himself "King of the Four Quarters of the World," and thought there was nobody like himself—till somebody stronger still came and tumbled him down and set up another little kingdom.

So things went on for hundreds of years. The whole country was dotted with these little city-states, and its history is nothing but their squabbles and struggles. But all the same men were advancing all the time, becoming wiser and more skilful, and better able to govern themselves. And when everything was ready, the right man came to knit things together. His name was Hammurabi, and he reigned in Babylon much about the time when Abraham the Hebrew came from this land into Palestine, say somewhere about 2,000 years before Christ. He really drew the whole country together into an empire, and made wise laws, and saw to it himself that they were carried out, as a good king should; and altogether he did a wonderful work for the country. But after the great man's death, as often happens, things did not go so well. And then a great raid of wild tribes from the highlands of Asia Minor swept over the land, and broke all settled government in pieces, and things were very miserable and confused for a long time.

But meanwhile, and for a considerable time, some of the folks from the plain had been moving upstream into the more hilly country; and there in the bracing air of the uplands, and with plenty of fighting to do, both against men and wild beasts, they were growing into a strong, bold race, fiercer and more warlike than

the people they had left behind in the plain. They took with them their native god, whose name was Ashur; they built a city for him, which they called Asshur; and in course of time they came to be known as the Assyrians, and their land as Assyria. And when Babylonia came, for awhile, to grief, as we have seen, they began to come to the front and to claim a right to be the lords over all the ancient East. And from the time when they set out to conquer the world, the history of the East for hundreds of years is just the history of how the Assyrians and the Babylonians fought, sometimes with one another, sometimes with the smaller nations around, sometimes with distant Egypt, for the mastery of the old world.

They were cruel and greedy almost beyond belief, and some of the things which they did were even more dreadful than the things we have been hearing of in the Great War; but both Assyrians and Babylonians were very wonderful people. They built great cities all over the land—two of them so great that the very names of them, Nineveh and Babylon, have always stood for all that is greatest in the way of a city in the world. They piled up huge temples to the gods; they executed wonderful works of art; they gathered great libraries of books, about which I must tell you later; they learned to trace the motions of the stars, and so laid the foundation of our modern sciences of astronomy and navigation. And then God's judgment came upon them for all their cruelty and their pride. First Babylon, with the help of the Medes, wiped Assyria off the map; and then the Medes and the Persians turned on Babylon and made an end of it.

Then came hundreds of years of darkness, when the

Persians held rule over all that Assyria and Babylon had once possessed, and when Persian and Greek fought fiercely for the mastery. And all that time the memory of the greatness of these old countries was slowly dying out of the world, and the dust of ages was covering the ruins of their great cities, until at last they had disappeared altogether from man's sight and knowledge, and no man could tell where "Nineveh, that great city," had stood. Babylon still lived on, a poor ghost of former greatness, for a time; but even Babylon at last was hidden under rubbish heaps and lost to human knowledge; and as for all the other great cities, the place that knew them once knew them no more. Four hundred years before Christ, the great Greek soldier and writer, Xenophon, led his Ten Thousand Greeks past the ruins of some of the greatest cities the world had ever known, and all that he could learn, with the names all wrong even then, was that such and such a city, great and impregnable, had once stood there; but the gods had made its inhabitants senseless, and so it fell.

Then even that little glimmer of light went out, and there was darkness absolute. And the land went back more and more to wilderness, and the desert sands went on drifting, drifting, and piling higher and higher over the relics of vanished splendours. Sometimes a traveller told a story, that nobody more than half believed, about great mounds in Mesopotamia that were supposed to cover ancient Nineveh and ancient Babylon, or even brought back with him a brick or two with strange writing upon it that no man could read. But that was all, until in the middle of last century the buried cities of this ancient world began suddenly to rise out of their graves, and the whole

world stood astonished at the glory that was revealed. How it all happened I must tell you in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

BURIED TREASURE

We have all been fond, at one time or another, of reading stories of the search for buried treasure, and have felt the strain of excitement as the spade of the adventurer jarred upon the lid of the iron-bound chest full of gold and jewels. But I question if ever any searcher after Captain Kidd's or Teach's hoard had a more thrilling time or more wonderful fortune than fell to the lot of the men who first dug their trenches into the great mounds that covered some of the buried cities of Assyria. It was to a Frenchman that the honour fell of being first in the field. In 1842 M. Paul Emil Botta was sent out to Mosul as French consul, and almost immediately began to make excavations in a great mound called Qoyunjik, not far from Mosul. For a good while he had no luck worth talking about, and he was almost ready to give up in despair, when a wandering Arab who had stopped to watch Botta's diggers at work, and no doubt to wonder how Allah should ever have made such fools as these Frank infidels, told him that in a mound called Khorsabad, about five hours' journey from Mosul, there were plenty of the sculptured stones and lettered bricks for which he was looking.

Botta scarcely believed the man, but after a time he decided to give the new mound a trial, and his workmen had scarcely settled down to dig when they began to uncover parts of a wall that had been sculp-

tured with figures and inscriptions. The consul came at once himself as soon as he heard of their success, and then, day after day and week after week, as the workmen dug further and further into the mound, the walls and galleries of a great palace began to come to light. Of course it was only the lower part that was left; but all along the walls stretched wonderful sculptures, representing scenes of war and triumph, scenes of hunting and of feasting, while the doors of the rooms were guarded by strange and mighty creatures carved in stone, with the heads of men, the wings of angels, and the bodies of lions or bulls. When Botta sent home the drawings of his great discoveries, and still more when the actual sculptures themselves arrived in Paris, the excitement and admiration of the French knew no bounds. Fresh helpers were sent out to enable the consul to complete his work; and bit by bit the whole palace was revealed, and a part of the town which crouched beneath its walls.

It turned out that the palace and the town had been built, about 700 years before Christ, by a great Assyrian king and conqueror named Sargon, the man who captured Samaria and destroyed the kingdom of Israel. He had planned a magnificent house for himself to rest and take his pleasure in after all his wars were over, and it was quite easy to trace what the different rooms had been like, where the great reception-halls had been, and where the bedrooms, the kitchens, and the cellars of the great palace, and to follow the line of the huge walls that made the palace into a strong fortress, the citadel of the town which lay around. But strong though the palace was, it did not prove strong enough to protect the man who built it. The great soldier-king had only enjoyed his

PLATE 2



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WINGED MAN-HEADED LION (*pp.* 16-17)

From the sculpture in the British Museum

splendid new home for a little while when he was murdered in his own palace by conspirators; and after that the magnificent buildings were gradually deserted, as though the curse of the king's blood lay upon them, and Dur-Sharrukin, "Sargon's Burgh," fell into ruins, and lay unknown for centuries till the spades of Botta's workmen brought it to light again.

Meanwhile a young Englishman, Austen Henry Layard, was waiting at Constantinople, where he was attaché to the British Embassy, for his opportunity to engage in similar work. He had already travelled through the country, and had marked down one of the big mounds, called Nimrud, as the one he would like to excavate. Moreover, he had met Botta, and the two men had taken to one another at once. When Botta began to make his great finds at Khorsabad, he used to send his reports and sketches to Layard before they were published, and you can imagine how eager the young Englishman at Constantinople grew, as he turned over the wonderful pages, and how he longed for the time when he too would be able to have his share in these great discoveries.

At last his chance came. His chief, Sir Stratford Canning, knowing of his anxiety, offered to contribute £60 towards the cost of digging, and with this sum and a few pounds of his own to help it out, Layard set out from Constantinople to excavate the buried cities of Assyria. He was so eager to get to the scene of his work that he galloped night and day across the country without taking rest, save to change horses at the post-stations, till at last, twelve days after setting out, he reached Mosul, and was almost on the spot where he meant to work. He had to be very careful,

however, for, though Botta was friendly, other Europeans were not, and the Turkish pasha, who was pretty bad even for a Turkish pasha, would have been only too glad of an excuse to get rid of him. So he made a great show of going to hunt, and displayed boar spears and guns, while secretly buying the few tools that were needed for his work; and at last, on November 8, 1845, he drifted down the Tigris on a raft with three companions, and landed beside the great mound of Nimrud.

Next day he started digging with a staff of six Arab workmen. Layard set them to work at two likely spots on the mound, and they had scarcely begun to dig before it was evident that they were going to be successful. Slab after slab of sculptured alabaster which had once lined the walls of an Assyrian king's palace came to light, and before he lay down to sleep that night Layard had discovered two palaces—a very fair beginning for one day's work with six men. Of course it was only a beginning. The walls had to be followed up and traced so that the plan of the various rooms and passages could be made out. The workmen were unskilled and not very great workers, and the Turkish officials at Mosul, stirred up by some of the Europeans who were jealous of Layard's work, put every hindrance in his way. The very idea that he was digging only for sculptured stones seemed ridiculous to them. They were sure that he was seeking for buried gold. One day his friend Awad came to him very mysteriously, and showed him a few morsels of gold leaf which he had found sticking to some of the sculptures. "O Bey," he said, "Wallah! Your books are right, and the Franks know that which is hid from the true believer. Here is the gold, sure enough, and,

please God, we shall find it all in a few days. Only don't say anything about it to those Arabs, for they are asses, and cannot hold their tongues. The matter will come to the ears of the Pasha." He was greatly surprised when Layard told him he was welcome to keep all the gold he found, and his opinion of the wisdom of the Franks greatly diminished.

Bit by bit, however, in spite of all difficulties, the lines of the walls of the ancient palace chambers were laid bare. It was like bringing to life again a long dead and buried world. Here were sculptures of the king making an offering, or pouring out a libation over wild bulls or lions killed in the chase, his attendants holding a gorgeous umbrella over his head, or waving fly whisks to drive away those nuisances. Beside the great man, perhaps, there stood a guardian spirit, with human form, but with eagle head, and great wings outspread. On another part of the wall you might see the king going forth to battle in his war chariot, his bow bent with a strong arm, and the arrow drawn to the very head, while before him his enemies were fleeing and falling. Or it would be the siege of a town, with archers shooting on all sides against the towers of the town wall, and a battering ram hammering away, and bringing down the walls in ruins, while the king, standing behind, shot arrow after arrow among the miserable defenders.

In spite of the bad weather and continual rain, which made life at the mound very uncomfortable, everything was going well, and Layard's heart was being gladdened day after day by fresh discoveries, when suddenly word came from the pasha at Mosul that the diggings must be stopped at once. It had been found, he said,

that the diggers were disturbing the graves of good Moslems, and it could not be tolerated that unbelievers should profane the rest of the faithful. Of course, Layard knew that this was all nonsense, and was only an excuse. Indeed, when he questioned the officer who was appointed to look after things at the mound. this worthy told him quite frankly that he and his men had been ordered by the pasha to manufacture Moslem graves on the mound in order to get up an excuse. They had done it by bringing gravestones from distant villages, quite regardless of the fact that thus they were disturbing the rest of the true believers. "We have destroyed more real tombs of the true believers," he said, "in making sham ones, than you could have defiled between the Zab and Selamiyah. We have killed our horses and ourselves in carrying those accursed stones."

After a while, however, the opposition began to die down. The old pasha proved too great a rascal for even the Turkish Government to put up with, and his successor was much easier to deal with. Some of the officials at Mosul still tried to make trouble, but the work went gradually on, and the ancient palaces came bit by bit to light. And at last, one day came a crowning wonder of which I must let Layard tell you in his own words. "I was returning to the mound," he says, "when I saw two Arabs urging their mares to the top of their speed. On approaching me they stopped. 'Hasten, O Bey,' exclaimed one of them. 'Hasten to the diggers, for they have found Nimrod himself. Wallah! It is wonderful, but it is true! We have seen him with our eyes. There is no god but God.'" Hurrying back to the mound, he learned to his delight the cause

of the excitement. "The workmen had uncovered the upper part of a figure, the remainder of which was still buried in the earth. I saw at once that the head must belong to a winged lion or bull, similar to those of Khorsabad and Persepolis. It was in admirable preservation . . . I was not surprised that the Arabs had been amazed and terrified at this apparition. It required no stretch of imagination to conjure up the most strange fancies. This gigantic head, blanched with age, thus rising from the bowels of the earth, might well have belonged to one of those fearful beings which are pictured in the traditions of the country, as appearing to mortals, slowly ascending from the regions below."

The discovery of this wonderful monster (it turned out to be a winged, human-headed lion) made a tremendous sensation. Arab chieftains with their following, Turkish soldiers, Cadis, merchants from Mosul, all sorts and conditions of people crowded to see it and the similar creatures which were found later; and their remarks, if not very instructive, were at least very amusing. "This is not the work of men's hands," said the first Arab chief who saw the monster, "but of those infidel giants, of whom the prophet—peace be with him!—has said, that they were higher than the tallest date-tree; this is one of the idols which Noah—peace be with him!—cursed before the flood." Later on the pasha of the district came in person to see, accompanied by a large force of regular and irregular troops and three guns; and the remarks of his satellites were just as wise as those of the Arab chief. "These are the idols of the infidels," said one of them who had travelled. "I saw many such when I was in Italia with Reshid Pasha, the ambassador.

Wallah ! they have them in all the churches, and the Papas (priests) kneel and burn candles before them." "No, my lamb," said another, "I have seen the images of the infidels in the churches of Beyoglu ; they are dressed in many colours ; and although some of them have wings, none have a dog's body and a tail ; these are the works of the Jin, whom the holy Solomon—peace be upon him !—reduced to obedience and imprisoned under his seal." But the deputy of the Cadi expressed the Turk's true feeling. "May God curse all infidels and their works ; what comes from their hands is of Satan. It has pleased the Almighty to let them be more powerful and ingenious than the true believers in this world, that their punishment and the reward of the faithful may be greater in the next."

Altogether, in this great mound of Nimrud, Layard found no fewer than thirteen pairs of these monstrous creatures, some of them winged lions, some of them winged bulls. They were really the guardian genii who were placed on either side of the doorways into the great chambers of the royal palaces of Assyria, to prevent evil spirits and enemies of all kinds from entering. With such strange but majestic guardians, with the wonderful carved slabs of alabaster which made a band of pictures round the walls of each important room, showing all kinds of scenes of war and hunting, and with all the gay colouring which adorned the walls and the cedar roofs, an Assyrian palace must indeed have been a magnificent place to look upon.

So far, then, Layard's success had been quite extraordinary. Between November, 1845, and June, 1847, when he left Mosul at the close of his first expedition, he discovered in Assyria no fewer than eight

palaces, seven of them in this one mound of Nimrud. This mound, by the way, turned out to be the ruin of one of the towns which had once been the capital of Assyria. It had then been called Kalah, and the king who had had most to do with it was called Ashur-natsir-pal, a fierce and cruel soldier and conqueror, and a great huntsman. If you go to the British Museum and walk through the Assyrian Galleries, you will see the long ranges of these very sculptured alabaster slabs which Layard dug out of the mound of Nimrud, with their wonderful pictures of King Ashur-natsir-pal, hunting, feasting, charging in his chariot against his enemies, or besieging their cities; and you will see, too, the very winged lions and bulls which roused such excitement among the Arabs and Turks.

How did they get from far-off Mesopotamia to London? That was the difficulty that Layard had to face, and it was a tremendous one, for the lion that was first discovered measures eleven and a half feet in height by twelve feet in length, and the bull is only a few inches smaller, so that these figures weigh many tons. Layard had no skilled engineers with steam cranes to lift them, or railroads to move them to a seaport. He had only his clumsy, untaught Arab workmen, and a few beams of very poor wood, and some exceedingly bad rope. Most people would have given up in despair the idea of moving the great blocks; but Layard was not easily beaten.

Out of such wood as he could get, and some old iron left by M. Botta after his excavations, he made a great cart such as had never been seen in Mosul before. It made almost as much sensation as the winged bulls and lions, and when it was drawn over

the rotten bridge of boats that crosses the Tigris at Mosul, all business in the town was stopped for the day, and everybody came out to see the wonderful sight. Then he engaged a great crowd of Arabs, and by fastening a palm-fibre cable round the bull so that dozens of men could tail on to the rope while the great block was being pulled down on its side, and by propping it up stage by stage as it came down, he was able at last to get it lowered upon rollers. As the great weight came upon the rubbishy cable and ropes, they stretched more and more, in spite of the water which was thrown upon them, and at last, when the bull was within five feet of the rollers, they all broke together. The Arabs, of course, all went flying heels over head in a great cloud of dust, and the bull collapsed. Layard rushed into the trench expecting to find the precious sculpture shattered to atoms, but, to his amazement and delight, it was resting on the rollers quite uninjured, and exactly in the position which he wished it to occupy. Good luck could scarcely go further.

The wonderful cart was then brought along, the ground having been cut away so that the bull could be moved by the rollers right on to the top of its new carriage. This was comparatively easy, but when buffaloes were yoked to the cart and tried to pull it out of the trench, it could not be got to budge. Finally, it was hauled out by a gang of 300 Arabs, all screeching at the top of their voices, and was dragged yard by yard to the sound of drums and fifes and musket-shots to the bank of the Tigris. Later on a winged lion was brought out in the same way, and at last the two huge monsters were rafted down the river to Basra, whence they were shipped to London.

If the Arabs were amazed, the people of England were not less astonished. Layard had a most wonderful gift of telling his story in an interesting manner, and when his book, "Nineveh and its Remains," came out, and was followed by his great series of pictures of the discoveries, everybody read the story with breathless interest, and thousands thronged to the British Museum to see the great winged monsters which had cost so much trouble to bring there.

Altogether the sensation made by these discoveries was so great that people would not be content until Layard was sent out again to continue the work he had so well begun; and accordingly he started in 1849 in command of a new expedition as the representative of the British Museum. This time his main work was to be done, not at his old mound of Nimrud, but at another mound called Qoyunjik, which proved to have been the site of the most famous capital of Assyria, "Nineveh, that great city." His work here was just as successful as at Nimrud, though it no longer had the charm of novelty. In some respects it was even more interesting, because it brought to light the palaces and sculptures of kings with whom our Bibles have made us familiar. Everyone has read of Sennacherib, the Assyrian who "came down like a wolf on the fold." Layard unearthed at Qoyunjik the great palace which this mighty king and soldier built for himself, and which he adorned with sculptures, showing the progress of that very campaign in which Jerusalem was delivered out of his cruel hands.

The Assyrians were not fond, any more than other people, of mentioning their defeats, and Sennacherib has said nothing about bad luck in this campaign. On the contrary, he pictures it as a most triumphant

success, and one of the sculptured slabs represents him receiving the spoil of the city of Lachish, the town which we know he was besieging when Hezekiah's ambassadors came to him. Besides that he tells us very boastfully of all the losses he inflicted on Judah, and how he shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem, like a bird in a cage; but he nowhere says that he captured Jerusalem, and if he had done so, he would have been only too glad to have said it. And we know from other sources that this campaign that he so brags about really ended in disaster, as the Bible says—probably in a great attack of plague among his soldiers.

But Layard made another discovery in this same mound, which, though not nearly so striking at first sight as Sennacherib's war pictures, has proved far more valuable in the end. He came upon two small rooms which were filled with small clay tablets inscribed all over with the curious Assyrian arrow-headed writing, which we now call cuneiform. Later on his assistant, Mr. Rassam, found another store of these tablets. When scholars found out how to read the inscriptions on them (I shall have to tell you about that too), it was discovered that these stores of clay tablets were really the books of the great royal library of the Assyrian kings, which was gathered by some of the later Assyrian monarchs, especially by one called Ashurbanipal, whom the Greeks used to call Sardanapalus, and about whom they told most wonderful stories.

Bit by bit the books were read, and we were able to learn from the Assyrians' own writings all their ideas about how the world was made, and who the gods were and what they did, and the story of the adventures of some of their great early heroes. Some

of these stories I shall tell you later. There were histories which told of the chief events of the different reigns; there were astronomical books with observations of the planets and all sorts of mathematical calculations; there were hymns and prayers which show us how the Assyrians approached God in worship; there were letters of all kinds, and even lots of medical prescriptions. And not only were these books valuable as telling us about the Assyrians, but a great number of them proved to be careful copies, made by order of Ashurbanipal, of far earlier Babylonian books, so that we learn from them about Babylonia as well, and are carried away back hundreds of years beyond the time at which these copies were actually written.

Altogether it was a most wonderful find, and if Layard had never found anything else it would have amply repaid him for all his toil and trouble. But both he and Rassam made many other fine discoveries, and though much has been done since, and done in a more thorough and careful manner than Layard ever had money enough to attempt, yet no one has ever eclipsed the fame of the first explorers. Since then some very remarkable and thorough work has been done at different places both in Assyria and Babylonia. At one place called Tello, in particular, another Frenchman called M. de Sarzec laid bare the ruins of a very ancient Babylonian town called Lagash or Shirpurla, a town far older than Kalah or Nineveh; and it is from what he found there that we have been able to learn so much of what life was like in the very earliest dawn of history, the time of the little city-states of which I told you in the first chapter. An American expedition working at Nippur found a still older city, with thousands of clay tablets belonging to

the temple library of Enlil, the god of the town. And the Germans, working at Babylon, uncovered the great palace of Nebuchadnezzar and the splendid Procession Street, lined with beautiful enamelled reliefs of dragons and bulls, along which the great conqueror's victorious armies passed in triumph to give thanks at the great temple under the shadow of the vast tower of Babel. But none of them has ever been able to tell his story in so bright and fresh and interesting a way as Layard, and so I have taken our earliest explorer's work rather than that of any later discoverer as an example of how interesting the search for buried treasure may be, even though the treasure be not gold and jewels, but only wisdom.

CHAPTER III

AN ASSYRIAN CITY 2,800 YEARS AGO

Now that we have heard a little of how the wonders of Ancient Assyria were dug up again out of the ground, we want to try to get some idea of what life was like in the far-off days when these buried cities and palaces and temples still stood proudly overlooking the wide plains of the land between the rivers. Suppose, then, that we get away back into the past on some magic carpet, and that we are living about the year 870 or so before Christ. That seems far enough to go back, but really it only takes us about half-way to the dawn of history in these old lands. At that time a very great Assyrian king was reigning, whose name was Ashur-natsir-pal. If you want to be able to put him in his right place in your mind's eye, perhaps you will do it best by remembering that he reigned just a little while before King Ahab came to the throne of Israel.

I have chosen to go back to his time rather than to come further down the story to Sennacherib or Ashur-banipal and Nineveh, partly because his palace was the most important one which Layard discovered at Nimrud, and partly because he has left us a very clear story of his own doings.

Suppose, then, that we are travelling across the plains with a caravan of merchants. We have been slowly journeying for many days since we left Egypt, laden with fine things from the Land of the Nile—beautiful Egyptian linen, goldsmith's work and ivory, and such-like things—and now in the far distance we can see the towers of the great town of Kalkhi or Kalah lifting their heads above the horizon. High above them all there flashes a brilliant golden light like a star, and the merchants who have been here before tell us that it is the rays of the sinking sun striking upon the gilded top of the great tower of the temple of Ninib, the god of the city. We hurry on as fast as we can, urging our weary camels to their utmost speed, for sunset is drawing near, and we have no desire to find the city gates shut when we come up, and to be forced to spend the night outside the walls.

The nearer we come, the more we feel how unlike an Assyrian town is to any of the great Egyptian cities, such as Thebes or Memphis, which we have left behind us. Of course, the long line of the walls, with the projecting towers at frequent intervals, battlemented all round their tops, looks not unlike the wall of an Egyptian city too, though in Egypt there would be less brick and more stone. Here the wall is entirely of brick, except at the very foot, where it is rooted in a sloping platform faced with big stones, so as to be able to resist the sappers of a besieging

army, or the blows of the battering-ram. But instead of the tall slender obelisks, the huge stone gateways, and the towering flagstaves with gay pennons floating from them which would mark out the temple of Amen or Ptah in Thebes or Memphis, the main thing that attracts the eye in Kalah is the great temple-tower whose summit we saw flashing from far across the plain. It is really a very wonderful thing when you see it near at hand, though it is so different from the Egyptian temples, and though it is built for all the world just as a child would build a tower with his first box of bricks.

Now we have reached the great gate of the city, under the shadow of the two frowning gate-towers; and after a little haggling with the captain in command, and with the customs officer over the amount of duty to be paid on the merchandise which we carry with us, we are duly passed under the dark archway which leads through the thick wall to the busy streets. On either side of the narrow passage the guard is drawn up—a company of the famous Assyrian spearmen, soldiers whose backs no enemy has ever seen. High up in the towers we catch the glint of light from helmet and corselet, and know that the bowmen, too, are on the watch. In the gathering dusk our caravan makes its way through the narrow streets to the great inn where the southern traders have their head-quarters; but we are going with the secretary of the Egyptian Embassy, an Assyrian gentleman called Zil-Assur, to stay with one of his acquaintances in the town. Zil-Assur has a mind to buy this friend's house, so we are to lodge with Sarludari, the owner, overnight, and if the house is satisfactory, the bargain will be struck in the morning.

Sarludari's house does not look specially attractive from the street—Assyrian houses never do. A low arched gateway lets us enter into a dark narrow passage which leads right through the house to the inner door. When our host has opened this door, however, we get a new idea of the prettiness and comfort of his dwelling. The door leads into a central court, whose paths are paved with gaily-coloured tiles. In the midst a fountain is playing, while the paths are bordered by beds of bright flowers interspersed with sweet-smelling shrubs. In the fast fading evening glow the little garden makes a very pretty picture. Around it there runs a verandah supported on wooden pillars, and from this the various rooms of the house open. After Sarludari has given us water to wash our hands and feet, he invites us, till the supper is ready, to inspect the house so that we may be ready for business next morning.

First of all we climb, by a brick staircase, to the flat roof, whence we get a view over the roofs and streets of the city towards the royal palace and the temple of Ninib, with its great tower rising dark against the evening sky. The roof is surrounded by a battlemented wall, and it makes a favourite resort for the womenfolk of the household. Nearly all their work is taken up there in the early morning and at evening, and it is only in the great heat of the day that they go downstairs. Sarludari's wife and daughters sit in the fresh morning air, doing all kinds of fine embroidery work, by the hour together, while in another corner of the roof, screened off from their mistresses, the servants are baking, or washing and drying the household linen. Sometimes, to tell the truth, a good deal of gossip goes on between house-top and house-

top, though it is rather difficult to keep secrets that have to be spoken in a loud tone from one roof to another.

Going downstairs, we find that the rooms are long and narrow, as all Assyrian rooms are. They are covered with a flat ceiling which hides a roof of undressed palm trunks. A good many of the apartments are really only store-rooms, for a family in Assyria likes to keep the bulk of its possessions about it. Underneath the house is, not a cellar, but a fine underground room, which Sarludari shows us with great pride. Scarcely any light can enter it from above. It is floored with slabs of grey and white plaster, and the walls are covered with the same material, and are watered twice or thrice a day in the summer to keep the room cool. This is the most indispensable room in the house, to which the family retires when the blazing heat of the Mesopotamian summer sun makes life above ground unbearable.

After our survey and a good solid supper of meat, fish, and vegetables, we get to our beds. The servants of the household sleep on mats laid on the floor, but we, as honoured guests, have wooden bedsteads standing upon feet carved like lions' paws, and provided with a mattress and two warm blankets, for it grows chilly in Assyria in the early morning. Each bedroom has its amulet, a bronze, jasper, or clay image of the destroying demon of the south-west wind, who brings fever and all sorts of evil, inscribed with a charm bidding him keep far away. Before he lies down, Zil-Assur, who is as superstitious as any other Assyrian, in spite of his Egyptian training, gabbles over a charm to keep him safe : "The pestilence and fever which



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might carry me off; the evil spirit, the evil imp, the evil man, the evil eye, the slanderous tongue, may they be driven away from this man, from his body, from his bowels. May they never come behind my back, never wound my eye, never come near my body; may they never enter my house, never cross the beams of my roof, never descend into my dwelling. Double of heaven, conjure them! Double of the earth, conjure them." Charm or no charm, however, we are all too tired to care much for evil spirits, and are soon sound asleep.

Morning brings business. After seeing the house, Zil-Assur has definitely decided to buy it; and he and Sarludari have come to terms. So we all go out to the gate of Ninib where the judge will be sitting, taking with us a scribe and the needed witnesses. The deed of sale is settled, written on a clay tablet, and read over by the judge in the presence of us all. Then the judge affixes his seal, and Sarludari and his wife, who, like many of the well-to-do Assyrians, cannot write, affix their nail-marks in the soft clay, and the business is done. Here is the deed as the judge reads it over: "The nail-marks of Sarludari and Amat-suhla, his wife, owners of the house which is sold. The house, which is in thorough repair, with its woodwork, doors, and court, situated in the city of Kalah, and adjoining the houses of Mannu-ki-akhi and Ilu-ittiya, has been bargained for by Zil-Assur, the Egyptian secretary. He has bought it for one maneh of silver, royal standard, from Sarludari and Amat-suhla. The money has been paid in full, and the house received as bought. Withdrawal from the contract, lawsuits, and claims, are hereby excluded. Whoever hereafter at any time,

whether these men or others, shall bring an action against Zil-Assur, shall be fined ten manehs of silver. Witnessed by Murmaza, the official, Nebo-dur-uzur, the champion, Murmaza, the naval captain, and Zedekiah." Then follows the date and the governor's name. You see the Assyrians are pretty slippery customers in business, and things have to be tied up very strictly to prevent fraud.

Business over, we take a stroll through the streets. Down by the riverside where the Tigris rolls swiftly past the quays and water-gates of the city, we see the quaint boats in which a great deal of the traffic of the land is carried on. They are very different from the graceful river-boats and sea-going galleys of the Egyptians, for they are neither more nor less than great round baskets of willow wands, covered with skins. Some of them, however, are very large, and can carry more than ten tons of cargo. Of course they are no use for going upstream, and so the way in which they are used is this: When sufficient goods are gathered to make a cargo for a little fleet of them, the merchant loads them, puts a few asses on board along with himself and his goods and servants, and drifts downstream to the town where he wishes to trade. There he sells his goods and the wicker-baskets from which he has stripped the skins, packs the skins on the backs of the asses, and makes the return journey by land. It is a cumbrous way of trading certainly, but it is cheap, for nothing is lost except time, and folks are not in a great hurry as yet.

Of course there are other vessels on the river besides these clumsy tubs, sharp-nosed police-galleys, with armed men on board them, driven through the water by sturdy oarsmen, and ferry-boats of various shapes

and sizes; but the riverside is rather a disappointment to those who have seen the Nile covered with its fleets of swift and beautiful boats and ships. So we turn uptown to see whether we cannot find anything more worthy of Assyria's great fame. One thing we notice at once in the crowded streets is the dress of the people. No longer have we the bare bronzed skin, or the pure white linen of the Egyptian. Here everyone wears plenty. A good thick cap made of a substance like felt, and often quilted, covers the head. The body is wrapped in a thick woollen tunic, of gay colour, and bedecked with a fringe, which falls to the knees; and over this, in cold weather at all events, another heavy robe is worn, which reaches nearly to the feet. The arms are left bare, and the feet are shod either with sandals or laced boots, though these are more often worn by the army than by civilians. Instead of the clean-shaven Egyptian faces, we see all around us bushy curled black beards, and thick heads of black hair, plentifully anointed with scented oils. In fact, the Assyrians and Babylonians go by the name of "the black-headed folk." The crowd in the streets is much more gaily-coloured than in an Egyptian town—not to say much more gaudy, and far more greasy.

The different quarters of the town are divided among the various trades—one to the weavers, another to the smiths, a third to the dyers, and a fourth to the stone-cutters and carvers, and so forth. Babylonia has long been famous for its weaving of the "goodly Babylonish garments" of fine texture and beautiful design and colour, and the Assyrian weavers are not far behind. Here you can see all sorts of splendid stuffs—fine tapestry hangings for a king's palace or a nobleman's

house, glowing with the softest and richest colours, for the dyers of the land are as famous as its weavers, thick woollen mantles, warm enough to keep out the cold when the wind blows fierce across the snow-mountains to the north, or delicate fabrics for the dresses of the fine court ladies.

In the smiths' quarter at present it is mostly armour that is being made, for everyone in the town believes that war is near; it is seldom anything else. Some of the weapons are beautifully finished and inlaid, and the Assyrian armourer prides himself on the fine temper of his swords and spearheads. In the next street you will find the goldsmiths and jewellers at work. You turn to the brothers Bel-akh-iddina and Bel-sunu whose shop attracts you, for you want a ring to carry home with you as a memento of your visit; and when you have made your choice, you get along with your ring a guarantee of its quality written on a clay tablet and printed with the nail-marks of the two brothers. This is how it reads: "As for the gold ring set with an emerald, we guarantee that for twenty years the emerald shall not fall out of the ring. If it should fall out before the end of twenty years, we shall pay an indemnity of ten manehs of silver." It isn't at all likely that we shall be here to claim the fine if the emerald does fall out; but the Assyrians are a careful people.

It will be worth our while before we go home again to turn to the engravers' street, and see a seal-cutter at work; for there are no engravers in the world like the seal-cutters of Babylonia and Assyria. Long ago, before iron was known, and when only soft bronze and copper tools could be had, they managed to cut the most wonderful little pictures on seals of the very

hardest stone. Nowadays, they use the turning-lathe to shape the seals; they polish the stones with emery and sand, and they engrave the most elaborate and intricate designs in a space so small that you would almost need a magnifying glass to follow all the details. It is a thriving trade, for nearly everybody has a stone-seal hanging at his girdle, a bit of jasper, or carnelian, or diorite, carved with his own device, to impress upon the clay tablets that record his business transactions. It makes your eyes sore to watch the engravers poring over their fine work, and when you see the result you wonder how men ever had the patience and the skill to do such things.

On our road home, we pass one of the places that you find in all great towns—a beer-house situated in a cellar below the level of the street, where decent folks don't care to be seen, and where fools go and waste their hard-earned wages. But there is one thing to be said for these Assyrian lawgivers. They keep a tight hand over drunkenness and drinking. Long, long ago, in Abraham's time, the old king of Babylon, Hammurabi, made a law that if any woman who kept a beer-house (it is mostly women who follow this trade) did not report any disorderly conduct in her house to the police, she should at once be put to death. Laws like that have literally put the fear of death into Assyrian and Babylonian public-house keepers and drunkards; and while their trade remains a poor business at the best, the beer-house managers do their best to keep it orderly, for the sake of their own necks.

So at last, after a long day among the markets and shops of Kalah, we return to Zil-Assur's new house to pass the night. To-morrow we shall see the great

sights, the temple, and the palace, and perhaps get a glimpse of Ashur-natsir-pal himself. For the king has heard that the southern peoples are growing restless, and he is anxious to get first-hand news from anyone who comes from the south.

CHAPTER IV

THE KING GOES HUNTING

MORNING, however, brings us the news that the king is going off to the foot of the mountains for a few days on a great lion hunt, and that we must hasten if we wish to see the Lord of the Four Quarters of the World. So we hurry away towards the palace, and erelong we see its enormous battlements towering above the rest of the city walls where these overlook the bank of the Tigris. Palace and temple stand side by side, and both are memorials of Ashur-natsir-pal's splendour and wealth, and of the wonderful success he has had in his wars; for only one who had conquered many nations could have commanded all the costly materials from distant lands which make these buildings the most gorgeous ever yet seen in Assyria. An Egyptian king would have put out all his splendour on a temple to the god who gave him victory, and would himself have lived in a comparatively simple and unpretentious, though exquisitely decorated, building. But an Assyrian monarch, though he may give much to the gods, never forgets to give more to himself, and the magnificence of the Palace of Kalah would make Pharaoh's home at Thebes look insignificant.

Along the east bank of the Tigris runs a great

platform cored with unburnt, and faced with burnt and glazed bricks, except on the outer side where it forms the continuation of the city wall, and where it is faced with stone. On this platform, which is solid except for the drains that pierce it and carry off the rainwater, rises the palace itself. It is a great square, 350 feet long on each side. In the centre of the square lies an open court, 125 feet long by 100 feet wide; and round this court are grouped all the rooms of the palace—the women's quarters on one side, the king's own apartments on another, while the great reception chambers and the offices of the state departments occupy the rest of the building. Most magnificent of all is the great hall of audience, where the king sits on his throne to receive his courtiers or the ambassadors of foreign powers, and to try cases of importance. An elevated platform, on which stands a great chair of ivory and gold carved with lions' heads on the arms and lions' legs for the feet, occupies one end of the hall, and from it the chamber runs for 154 feet. A little more width would have made it a very noble room; but the Assyrian was always afraid to build his rooms wide because of the difficulty of getting beams long enough to act as rafters, and though he knew how to build an arch of brick, he never ventured to vault over a whole room in this fashion. So the great hall is only 33 feet wide, and in spite of its gorgeous decoration looks more like a very splendid corridor than a king's chamber.

All around this gallery, and indeed round all the public rooms of the palace, runs a line of sculptured alabaster slabs. Each slab has carved upon it a picture of some of the achievements of the king, either in war or in the chase; so that as you walk round the rooms

you have a pictured history of his reign before your eyes. The halls are roofed with costly cedar beams from Lebanon, magnificent curtains of varied colours hang across the entrances, and everywhere there is a profusion of gilding and decoration, so that the eye grows weary of splendour.

But now the travelling chariot of the king is waiting at the gate of the inner courtyard, and in a few minutes the royal hunting party will be starting. The chariot seems heavy and clumsy to one accustomed to the light and graceful cars of the Egyptians; but it is gorgeously decorated with plates of beaten gold, and the three magnificent horses, which paw the ground impatiently as they wait for their master, are splendid in gold-mounted harness. Over the chariot, on the side where the king will stand, is fixed a great umbrella, gay with blue, white, and red, to shade His Majesty from the blazing Mesopotamian sun. Behind the chariot is drawn up a double line of horsemen, the royal body-guard. Ashur-natsir-pal has paid great attention to the cavalry branch of his army, and these men are a pretty workmanlike force, though their saddles are very primitive, and the want of stirrups makes their seat somewhat precarious. One line consists of lancers who bear a long spear in addition to their swords and daggers; the other is made up of bowmen, whose bows, though smaller than those of the archers in the infantry divisions, are stiff enough to require both strength and skill in the bending of them. Both lines wear peaked bronze helmets and quilted cuirasses with metal scales sewn upon them.

Now the great bronze-plated cedar doors of the palace open, and the king himself comes forth in all his glory, his courtiers bowing to the ground as he



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passes. The great conqueror is a man of middle height, square-shouldered, broad-chested, and heavily bearded on both cheeks and chin, the black locks of head and beard arranged in a multitude of curls and heavily oiled and perfumed. On his head he wears the royal cap, of white woollen stuff, striped with blue, and adorned with a band of gold embroidery. His under-dress is of deep blue, and has sleeves coming down almost to the elbow, leaving the brawny and sun-burnt forearms exposed. Over this garment he wears a heavy cloak of white woollen stuff, with gay-coloured astrakhan trimming, and heavy embroidery of red, blue, white, and gold. This cloak falls to his feet, so that the royal figure is completely enveloped in it, and looks rather shapeless and clumsy. In the broad golden girdle are thrust two daggers, while a short sword, with a sheath of ivory and gold, and a golden pommel of somewhat heavy design, hangs from the belt. His Majesty is bedizened with jewellery; heavy earrings hang down to his shoulders; a broad golden necklet encircles his thick neck, and each wrist is adorned with a massive bracelet. Altogether he makes a very sumptuous and imposing figure, thoroughly Oriental in its gaudiness and glitter and grease, as he steps into the waiting chariot. With a plunge or two the fiery horses start, and as the charioteer pulls them into a more sober and stately gait the outer doors that open from the courtyard on the platform are thrown wide, and the royal chariot sweeps out between the colossal human-headed bulls and lions which guard the entrance, and glides down the long slope into the street which leads to the city gate. The guard clatters along behind the chariot, and the cars of the courtiers who are to share the

royal hunt follow at a respectful distance; and the whole gay cortège winds off across the plain towards the distant blue hills at whose base the hunting camp has already been pitched.

Lions are still fairly plentiful in Mesopotamia, and they are peculiarly the royal quarry in hunting. In ancient days they were so numerous as to be an absolute terror to the land, and it was no less the king's duty than his pleasure to make war upon them, as upon any other enemy of the kingdom. Three hundred years before, Tiglath-Pileser I., a mighty hunter before the Lord as well as a mighty king, boasted as loudly of the lions, the wild bulls, and the elephants he had slain, as of the foes he had conquered. Times have changed, however, since the days when the elephant gave the great Pharaoh of Egypt, Thothmes III., such a narrow run for his life on the banks of the Euphrates. The elephant has disappeared, practically exterminated by constant hunting; the wild bull is growing scarcer and scarcer, and the lion no longer ranges almost to the gates of the big towns. Still, if you go to look for him in his lairs among the scrub at the foot of the hills and in the marshland, he is generally to be found.

By the time that the royal party has reached the hunting camp, the state huntsmen have succeeded in locating a pair of lions in a patch of jungle not far away, and the whole company moves at once towards the spot. Arrived there, the foot-guards and huntsmen, accompanied by a number of fierce dogs of a brindled mastiff type, proceed to beat the jungle, with the view of driving the lions to the open plain; while the chariots of the party, and the horsemen of the bodyguard, are ranged in a wide ring around the spot



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STATUE OF ASHUR-NATSIR-PAL III. (*p.* 34)

From the original in the British Museum.

ready to intercept anything that may break out. Before long a fierce barking, with an accompaniment of thunderous growling, announces that the dogs are in touch with their quarry, and presently a big black-maned lion bursts out of the jungle, leaving behind him a guardsman whose helmet and skull have been crushed by a single blow, and a couple of mangled dogs. He evidently considers discretion the better part of valour, and rushes past the royal chariot, making for the hills; but the king's bow is drawn with a sure hand, and a swift arrow takes the fleeing brute right between the shoulders—a splendid shot which checks his speed at once. It is followed by a second which pierces the monster just behind the right shoulder, and a third which enters at the back of the ear; and, mortally stricken, the great beast sinks at once to the ground and dies almost without a struggle.

Such good fortune is most unusual, and it is followed by what might well have been a tragedy. The king has scarcely had time to lower his bow after his last successful shot, when a shout from behind makes him turn hastily in the chariot. There within fifty yards of him is the other lion, which has broken out from the jungle while the attention of all was rivetted upon his companion. A few strides will bring him upon the chariot, and long before the foot-guards who are in hot pursuit can divert his rage, all will be over. But Ashur-natsir-pal's eye is quick and his hand steady. The charging lion is met full in the chest by a well-aimed shaft. As he winces from the stroke, a second catches him in the flank, and a third in the crest. Unconquerable to the last, he still comes on, roaring with mingled anger and pain; but a fourth shaft takes

him deep in the breast, and just as he raises his mighty paw to strike down chariot and huntsmen together, his strength fails, and he falls almost upon the king, while the royal bow is still bent for another shot.

It is a sufficiently splendid result for a short day's hunting, and the king is not a little proud of his success, and above all of the presence of mind which he has shown. It is not always, however, that such speedy triumph rewards the hunting party. Sometimes the lions take to the bush-covered islands in the great marshes, and it is a task of no small difficulty and danger to drive a light skiff through the tangled reeds and water-plants and to get within effective arrow-shot of the quarry. Indeed, on one occasion the king and all his party nearly paid for their daring with their lives. One lion had been secured and slain without much difficulty; when, as the oarsmen drove their craft through a narrow channel, half-choked with undergrowth and water-plants, a deafening roar was heard, and a huge lion hurled himself from the bank upon the very gunwale of the boat. Generally speaking, it would have been more than a man's life was worth for any subject to wound a lion while the king was there in person to do the killing; but this was no time for ceremony. As the boat heeled almost gunwale under beneath the mighty paws of the fierce brute, two guardsmen sprang to their feet and met the lion with the thrust of their spears, while a third covered the king with his shield. Ashur-natsir-pal never for a moment lost his presence of mind. His bow was drawn instantly, and an arrow flashed between the guardsmen into the lion's shaggy chest. After a short struggle the great brute fell back dead into the water, and was hauled out in triumph and slung on the stern

of the boat. Then the guardsmen who had dared to come between the king and death bowed low before their master and craved his pardon for having been so presumptuous as to strike the royal game; and in consideration of the unusual circumstances and the need for haste, His Majesty was graciously pleased to forgive their impetuosity.

For the next two or three days hunting continues with varying success; but on the fourth day a courier arrives from Kalah with important news. The tribes of Northern Syria, upon whose territories Ashur-natsir-pal has long cast envious eyes, have at last given him the pretext which he desires. They have joined in alliance, have robbed several Assyrian merchants, and slain an Assyrian resident. Ashur-natsir-pal could not have wished for anything better. Now he has a plausible excuse for descending upon them and bringing them under the Assyrian yoke, as he meant to do all along. The hunting-camp is broken up, and the royal party returns to Kalah in haste, bearing the bodies of the slain lions slung on poles. Then in the palace, to the strains of sacred music, the royal hunter solemnly pours a libation of wine over the carcases of the brutes, less ferocious than himself, whom he has vanquished, and turns to the arrangements for the still more congenial sport of hunting human beings.

CHAPTER V

THE WARS OF A ROBBER-NATION

HAVING found his excuse for making war on his neighbours, King Ashur-natsir-pal loses no time about his preparations. Indeed, this is the great advantage

that Assyria has in warfare over her enemies, that, as she always means mischief, she is always prepared. Other nations make war, sometimes because they must, to defend themselves, sometimes because they have an ambitious king over them, who leads them into adventures which they would not have sought of their own free will; but Assyria makes war because war is her trade. She lives by war—her chief source of wealth is not her fertile land, nor her trade, it is the spoil which she wrings from her conquered enemies. Her existence depends upon the fact that she has always, at any given moment, a stronger hand than any power or combination of powers opposed to her; and when the time comes when that ceases to be the case, she will fall beyond hope of recovery, and no one will pity her. For she is the great robber-nation of the world, and while a successful robber may be feared and flattered, an unsuccessful robber has no friends.

Therefore, Assyria is always on a war-footing. Her army is always ready; and whenever her king thinks a fresh robbery feasible and advisable, she generally manages to strike her blow before her opponents have gathered their scattered forces or settled upon a united plan of action. So now, though the North Syrian tribes have been provoked into giving the Assyrians an excuse to attack them (it is not difficult when you have had as much practice in provocation as Assyria has had), the king's army is quickly assembled, and is ready to march almost before the doomed peoples in the west realize the danger of what they have done.

The force destined for the war in Northern Syria is now mainly camped outside the walls of Kalah, and we shall see it march off with the king in command. Armies have grown somewhat in size within the last





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HUNTING SCENES (*p.* 38)

From the slabs in the British Museum

CAMBRIDGE

century or two, and where Thothmes or Ramses of Egypt found a force of from twenty to twenty-five thousand sufficient, Assyria will probably need double the number, even though her troops are very much better equipped and organized than the Egyptian forces ever were. Later she will need bigger armies still, and find 120,000 men none too many in her desperate struggles to maintain her supremacy. But to-day the army which King Ashur-natsir-pal is leading forth may number something like 50,000 or 60,000 men, and will probably be amply sufficient, at that figure, for all its work.

The king himself marches at the head of the chariot brigade, which is the crack corps of the army. It has all the conceit and swagger of a crack corps, and its members, who are nearly all of the aristocracy, look down with great scorn on the new cavalry, and still more on the infantry. All the same, the more modern and scientific members of the Assyrian staff are well aware that the day of the chariot in war is drawing to a close. It is too cumbrous, requires too much room on the march through mountainous countries, is awkward to transport across rivers, and takes up far too many horses in proportion to its fighting strength. Even as it is, the infantry does far more real work; and when the cavalry has been developed properly the chariot will drop out of use as an arm of the service altogether. Here is the brigade, however, magnificent to look at, and as sure as ever that it is indispensable. The chariots have three horses yoked to them, and are occupied by a charioteer, a man of lower rank and plainer equipment than his companion, and a bowman.

The bowman wears a pointed bronze helmet and a quilted cuirass with metal scales. A bow case and a

double quiver are fastened to the front and sides of the car, while a bucket behind holds a lance for work at close quarters. The royal chariot differs from the others only in its more gorgeous decoration, and in the fact that it is somewhat wider, the reason being that it has to hold three men instead of two, the charioteer, the king, and the king's shield bearer. A further distinction between it and the rest of the brigade is that on the march the striped umbrella already mentioned is fastened above the king's head. This, of course, is discarded in the day of battle. The royal horses are bred in the Cilician plains, and are superb creatures, full of fire, and wonderfully enduring as well as spirited.

So far, the cavalry, both lancers and bowmen, are rather by way of being an awkward squad. The riders have not yet learned completely how to control and guide their mounts by the pressure of the knees; and, accordingly, each soldier has a companion who rides on his left hand, and guides the horse of the fighting man by means of a leading rein. This is a great waste of power, and a great drawback to the efficiency of the brigade; but King Ashur-natsir-pal has complete faith in the future of the cavalry, and is steadily increasing their numbers. Already the mounted men only require two horses to a fighter, instead of three, as in the chariotry; they are swifter than their swaggering rivals, and can go where the chariots could never venture. When the riders are trained to do without their nursemaids, there will be no comparison possible between the efficiency of the two arms.

The backbone of the army, however, is the infantry. To see the regiments march past is to realize something of the power of the finest fighting instrument the

world has yet seen. They are divided into heavy and light armed spearmen, archers, and slingers, and are supplemented by a corps of sappers for entrenching and siege work. The heavy infantry wear the usual conical helmet and cuirass quilted with metal, and are shod with heavy laced boots coming well up the leg. They carry a six-foot spear and a sword, with a big shield, round and dish-cover shaped, with a central boss. The light infantry have a crested helmet and a small wicker shield; while the bowmen and slingers have no shield at all. The sappers are the humblest branch of the service; but they are becoming of continually greater importance, for no army has carried the development of siege warfare so far as the Assyrian, and already many of the siege engines that will become famous in classical days are to be seen in operation with the Mesopotamian armies.

At last the omens have proved favourable, being exactly the same as when the great Sargon of Babylon, the typical hero of the race, marched out on his first campaign. Ninib, the patron god of Kalah; Ashur, the national god; and Ishtar, the goddess of war, as well as of love, have signified their approval of the king's plans, and the great host moves off across the plains. Picking up contingents from the various provinces as it goes westward, and dropping reinforcements for the garrisons in the commanding frontier fortresses, it crosses the Euphrates almost in face of the famous city Carchemish, where a Hittite king still reigns over a fragment of that once great nation. Time was when the Hittites would have made a fair match for the greatest army that Assyria could bring against them; but they have dwindled and their rival has grown, and though Sangara, the King of Carchemish, had

quite resolved to fight as long as the Assyrians were far away, he changed his mind when he saw the serried battalions crossing the great river and deploying under the walls of his town. He hastened to make his submission, and Carchemish was spared the horrors of a siege, though its inhabitants had to pay pretty sharply for the luxury of having plotted against Assyria.

Other tribes, and especially the kingdom of Patin, whose king, Lubarna, had been the moving spirit of the insurrection, hastened to follow the example of Carchemish, and the Assyrian army, greatly to its disgust, seemed likely to have nothing more than a military promenade through North Syria. But when the passes of the Lebanon had been reached, the prospect of a fight grew brighter. The chief of Aribua, a strong fortress town on the western slope of the Lebanon, more daring or more desperate than his neighbours, refused to come out and "smell the earth" before the conqueror. His gates were closed, his cattle driven in, and his walls manned, and when the Assyrian light infantry approached the town, a flight of arrows and stones made a good many gaps in their ranks, while a sudden charge from one of the gates actually broke and scattered one regiment with considerable loss before the daring Syrians were driven back into the town again. Ashur-natsir-pal, though he professed to be indignant, was really delighted. Now he would get his troops blooded, and have an opportunity for the exercise of all that cold-blooded cruelty which was even dearer to an Assyrian's heart than all the spoil of war. The siege began with a great parade of the whole Assyrian force, which marched right round the walls under the eyes of the wondering inhabitants. It was no mere piece of swagger, but a



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THE LION'S CHARGE (*p.* 40)

calculated attempt to impress the townsfolk with some idea of the mighty instrument whose blows were about to fall upon them.

Then the lines were drawn close, and the siege began. Under the cover of great wooden mantlets, huge shields which moved on wheels, detachments of archers, commanded by the king in person, took station near the walls, and poured a constant hail of arrows upon the battlements and against every loop-hole. While the attention of the besieged was thus engaged, the sappers swiftly cast up an earthen bank against the walls, so that the battering ram could be brought into play, and as soon as the bank was high and solid enough this great structure began to move forward. It was a little fortress of wood and wicker-work, mounted on wheels. In front were two light towers: one square-topped so that a few archers could fire from it over the town wall and so cover the party working the ram; the other round-topped and covered with raw hide. From the front of the latter, between two great mantlets of wood and raw hide, the ram swung on its pivot, a great wooden beam with a heavy bronze head, capable of delivering a tremendous blow. In the back part of the little fortress gathered the gang which swung the ram, and the spare archers who took the place of their companions on the tower as these were killed or wounded.

The advance of the ram meant inevitable destruction to the city unless its attack could be foiled. Accordingly, every effort was made to destroy or cripple the dreaded instrument. As it drew near to the walls, the gate nearest to it was suddenly opened, and a cluster of desperate men, spear or sword in one

hand, and burning torch or faggot in the other, rushed against the ram under cover of a shower of arrows and stones from the battlements. For a few moments it seemed as though they had succeeded, for the wicker-work on one side began to smoke and burn; but the forlorn hope was falling fast, and before the structure was well alight the arrival of fresh troops on the Assyrian side settled the business. The few Syrians who remained alive were speedily surrounded and captured, and the burning ram was rescued and extinguished.

And now followed one of the horrors of ancient warfare. The captured men were led before the king. He surveyed them with mingled satisfaction and contempt, and then made a sign to the officer in command of the guard. That worthy, with a grin of fierce delight, marched off the brave men who had not been fortunate enough to die to a point in full view of the city wall. Here lay a row of strong sharpened stakes, the same in number as the captives. A stake was thrust through the body of each prisoner, and then raised with its writhing burden and set into a deep hole in the ground, and the miserable sufferers were left to die in slow agony under the eyes of their friends in the city.

As the days dragged on, the state of the citizens grew more and more desperate. The wall began to crumble under the repeated blows of the ram, aided by the picks of the sappers, who stole up to the very base of the fortifications, and established themselves there almost out of arrow-shot, though every now and then one of their number would be crushed by a great stone. One of the gates was burned almost through; and at last a combined assault by all arms resulted in

the weakened defence being swept from the walls. The town was carried, and then began all the horrors of Assyrian triumph. The unfortunate king who had not been able to find death at the head of his men was led before Ashur-natsir-pal. His nose had been pierced and a metal ring thrust through it, a cord attached to which was handed to the king. The captive was forced to his knees before his conqueror, and the Assyrian king, jerking up the poor wretch's head by the cord, slowly thrust his spear first into one eye and then into the other, and then delivered over the blinded and bleeding victim to the torturers. These began by plucking out his tongue; then driving four strong posts into the ground they spread-eagled the beaten chief by wrists and ankles to the posts, and slowly flayed him alive, leaving his ghastly body to writhe and twist in its bonds under the hot sun till merciful death put an end to suffering.

The women and children were sent back under guard into Assyria to serve as slaves; but for the fighting men there was no mercy. Death was the best fortune that could happen to them; but the Assyrians were masters in the art of making men die by inches, so that they should feel every agony to the last. The city was burned, the site of it dug over and sown with salt. Then for a last memorial of his triumph, the king reared before the spot where one of the gates had stood a pyramid of the severed heads of those whom he had slain. Even that was not brutal enough to satisfy his lust of cruelty. There remained a number of miserable prisoners not yet released by death; and of these, living as they were, he built another pyramid before the other gate; and waited till by slow suffocation, and sunstroke, and madness,

the last quiver of life had gone out of all the tortured limbs. Then he struck his camp, and marched westwards towards the coast of the Mediterranean, having first sent an express home with a dispatch telling of his triumph, and with orders to his architect to carve on the walls of his palace the scenes of the siege, and the record of all the atrocities inflicted by his command.

Marching down to the sea-coast, he met with no further opposition. The dread of his name had fallen upon the land. Where they could, the inhabitants fled before his approach and left a solitude; where flight was impossible, they submitted and paid ruinous tribute. On the Mediterranean shore the army drew up. Solemn sacrifice was offered to Enki, the god of the deep, and picked representatives of each arm of the service waded into the water behind their king, and, following his example, washed their weapons, so lately reeking with blood, in the waves of the Great Sea. From all the little kinglets of the coast, from Tyre and Sidon, Byblos and Arvad, tribute came pouring in; and among the treasures were strange things that the Assyrians had never yet seen—dolphins and narwhal tusks, and great store of curious woods. Ashur-natsir-pal had reached his farthest; and now he led his army home again in triumph, only stopping for a while in the Lebanon to cut cedar wood for the further beautifying of his palace.

Such was war, as made 850 years before Christ by the great robber-nation of the ancient world, the true ancestor in brutality of the modern robber-nation of Europe. Even [redacted] frightfulness, however, must yield a little to that of the ancient Assyrian. Under the shadow of such horrors, the whole world of ancient



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PLATE 9

ASSYRIAN CAVALRY CHARGING (*p.* 44)

From the Nimrud Gallery in the British Museum

days lived for something like 500 years, no nation sure for a year that the great freebooter of the Tigris might not cast envious eyes upon its territory or its treasures, and come down to slay and burn and torture. Can you wonder that when at last the very iniquity by which Assyria lived had drained her land of its manhood, and Nineveh fell, never to rise again, the whole civilized world sent up a unanimous shout of triumph? "All that hear the report of thee," said the Hebrew prophet Nahum, "clap the hands over thee; for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?" The world, with one voice, said "Amen!"

CHAPTER VI

A KING'S LIBRARY OF TWENTY-FIVE CENTURIES AGO

I DARESAY you sometimes go into a museum, and see the ancestors, as you might call them, of some of the things we use most to-day—a model, for instance, of Stephenson's first railway-engine, the "Rocket," or a model of the first steamship that ever ploughed the ocean. It is interesting to see how the engine or the steamship has grown out of the quaint old-fashioned thing that we see in the museum case into the powerful giant that hauls our modern trains, or the huge turbine-driven battleship that rules the seas. Well, did you ever think that just in the same way you can see the ancestors of this little book that you are reading, and of all the other books that stand upon your shelves and on those of all the libraries in the world? Some of them are just as quaint to look at, compared with our modern books, as the "Rocket" compared

with a modern express engine ; but, all the same, they are the great-grandfathers, ever so many times removed, of the volumes in your own bookcase.

King Solomon once said : "Of making of many books there is no end"; and it is quite true. Long before his time, indeed, almost as soon as men had learned how to shape letters and words so that other people could read them, they began to put together bits of history, and stories about their gods and their heroes, which made what are really and truly books. Each nation, almost, had its own separate way of making a book, and, no doubt, thought its neighbour nation's way a very silly and clumsy one. But, in the main, the different ways could be more or less reduced to two. There were nations that wrote what they wanted to say with a brush, or kind of pen, and inks of different colours, on a roll of prepared stuff, which might be parchment, made out of an animal's skin, or papyrus, what we call paper, made out of a plant ; and there were nations which wrote what they wanted to say with a sharp-pointed tool on a flat tablet of prepared stuff, which might be wax, or might be clay.

In the old days these two different systems practically divided the bookmaking of the world between them, and it was a question which way would prevail. There was a long time when it looked as though the second way, of the clay tablet and the sharp point, would win the day ; but, fortunately for us all, the other way proved the more convenient in the end, and our libraries are made of paper books, not of clay bricks. The chief race that used the papyrus roll and the brush or pen with ink was, as you know, the Egyptian people ; and I have told you elsewhere how they made their rolls, and how they wrote upon them

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LION HUNTING BY WATER

(Page 40)

with their quaint and beautiful picture-writing. The chief races that used the clay tablet and the sharp point were the Babylonians and the Assyrians; and I am going to tell you now how they made their books and what they put into them, and perhaps one or two of the old stories that have been read out of these old books of theirs.

To begin with, you know, all the nations of the world used pictures for their writing, instead of letters. Instead of writing the word for "soldier," they would draw a picture of a man with a feather on his head and a bow in his hand; or instead of the word for "door," they would draw a rough door made of three or four planks with a couple of cross-pieces. Then bit by bit the pictures, instead of always standing for a whole word, would come to stand for a syllable each, so that you might need two or three little pictures to make up a whole word. And then each picture came to stand for a letter, and by arranging your pictures in the order you wanted, you could write any word you liked. And then people began to get tired of having to draw the pictures so carefully, and drew just as little as they could manage to make themselves understood by. The Egyptians stood by their beautiful picture-writing longer than any other nation, because they were a nation of real artists, and loved to see a thing look pretty as well as read accurately; but even they gradually dropped the pictures except for great and important writing, and used a sort of running hand, which was just broken-down picture-writing, for their letters and business affairs and most of their books.

But the Babylonians and Assyrians gave up the picture-writing far earlier than the Egyptians did; and

the reason why they did so is very plain and brings us to the point of what their books were like. The Euphrates and Tigris either did not grow the papyrus plant along their banks, as the Nile did, or else the people of Mesopotamia had never learned how to use the plant for paper-making. So when they wanted to write they had to look for something else to write upon. Now in the soil of Babylonia especially there is a great deal of very fine clay. You remember how I told you that all the land in Babylonia is just mud and silt brought down by the rivers. So when a Babylonian wanted to write a letter he got a lump of this fine soft clay, spread it out till it made a little tablet a few inches square, or more generally oblong, and then he took a sharp point, very likely his dagger point to begin with, and scratched his pictures on the clay with it. But if you ever try to do that kind of thing you will soon find out that it is anything but easy. Straight lines you can draw well enough; but when you come to draw curves then the stiffness of the clay hinders you and spoils your writing.

So our Babylonian friend soon found that pictures were no good for writing in on clay. The Egyptian, with his little brushes of bruised reed and his inks, might make a neat job of it on papyrus, but he couldn't with his knife-point and clay. So he began to make his pictures as simple as he could, so that a man or a horse or a mountain would be represented just by two or three straight strokes; and at last he got the thing to the stage where the strokes in a certain arrangement stood for certain letters or syllables, and had no likeness at all to the original picture. And because, if you press a sharp point, wedge-shaped, as all sharp points are, into soft clay

you will find that the impression it leaves behind is broadest where you first pressed the point in, and tapers away to a point as you gradually draw the point out, so all our Babylonian writer's signs were broad at the beginning and tapered to a fine point, so that they were just for all the world like arrow-heads. And, indeed, sometimes these letters are called "arrow-headed characters"; but generally they are called "cuneiform," which means wedge-shaped, because they must have been imprinted by a tool shaped like a wedge. If you can imagine a lot of barbed arrow-heads cut off their shafts and flung higgledy-piggledy down upon a piece of flat ground, you will have a pretty good idea of what a piece of Babylonian or Assyrian cuneiform writing looks like.

Suppose, then, that a letter is to be written. We shall take a real one which was written by a young fellow in his first situation to his father at home. It was found at a town called Sippara, and is now in the museum at Constantinople. Young Zimri-eram takes a piece of clay and makes a tablet about three inches long by two broad, shaped very like a small cushion. Then he takes his sharp-pointed "stylus" or pen—you know we talk still about a man's "style" of writing—and he presses it into the clay, making wedge-shaped marks all over the surface, at all kinds of angles, and in all sorts of groups and combinations. It looks a hopeless muddle, but really each group of wedges has its own meaning and when at last he has covered the whole tablet, this is what he has written: "To my father, thus says Zimri-eram: May the Sun-god and Marduk grant thee everlasting life! May your health be good! I write to ask how you are; send me back news of your health.

I am at present at Dur-Sin on the canal of Bit-Sikir. In the place where I am living there is nothing to be had for food. So I am sealing up and sending you three-quarters of a silver shekel. In return for the money, send some good fish and other provisions for me to eat."

Then if the writing had been a very important one, the clay tablet would have been baked in a kiln before being sent off. As it is, there will be no need of that; but, at least, since that three-quarters of a silver shekel has to be sent, it will be as well to put the letter and the coin in an envelope. So Zimri-eram takes a lump of clay and rolls it out into a thin sheet bigger than his letter. He lays the tablet with the letter in the middle of the sheet of clay, and wraps the fresh clay round about it so that the writing is quite covered. Then upon this clay envelope he inscribes the destination of the letter. Finally, he takes from his girdle, where it hangs by a string, a little piece of green jade-stone, shaped just like a photographer's squeegee, and able to roll, like it, upon a pin which passes through it. This cylinder-seal, as it is called, is carved with signs, so that his father will know that the letter which bears its imprint is from his son. Zimri-eram rolls the cylinder-seal across the envelope of damp clay, and his letter is ready for the post-bag. I wonder if he ever got his good fish, and if his landlady was offended when it came.

That is how a letter is written, then, in the Land of the Rivers; and books are written in just exactly the same way. Each tablet is covered with as much writing as it will hold, and is then numbered, just like the chapters of a book. Let us suppose that the first tablet of the book begins with the words, "When the

gods Anu and . . .” Then that tablet will be called “First tablet of ‘When the gods Anu and . . .’” The next will be called “Second tablet of ‘When the gods Anu and . . .’” and so on. For fear that any word should be missed out in passing from one tablet to another, the second tablet always begins by repeating the last line of the first, and the third by repeating the last line of the second. Sometimes, in an old book in your father's library, you may see the last word or two at the bottom of one page repeated at the top of the next—a custom which has almost died out now. So now, when you see such a thing, you will know where it came from, and that it is just the repeating of the old Babylonian custom of carrying over a sentence from each tablet to the next.

As you can understand, when books were made of clay tablets, really small bricks, like that, it was rather a business to have a library. Whatever was the character of the stories written in them, the books themselves were heavy and clumsy to the last degree. A royal library of any size must have looked rather like a brickmaker's yard. In one of his essays Lord Macaulay makes fun of such writing: “Gomer Chephoraod,” he says, making a king of Babylon out of his own imagination, “was so popular that the clay of all the plains round the Euphrates could scarcely furnish brick-kilns enough for his eulogists. It is recorded in particular that Pharonezzar, the Assyrian Pindar, published a bridge and four walls in his praise.” But in spite of Macaulay's jest, and in spite of the cumbrousness of this way of making books, real libraries were got together, and have proved of infinite value in telling us what the Babylonians and Assyrians thought and believed about the gods, and the past

history of the world, what was the course of events in their own times, and what traditions had come down to them about their heroes and great men of the past.

Several of these libraries have been discovered. One, which was found in recent times at the ancient sacred city of Nippur, where the great spirit-god Enlil used to be worshipped, has great value because it preserves the oldest forms of the national legends. Others have turned out to have importance from different points of view—some because they contain medical and scientific books, others because they contain great masses of the accounts of big business firms, such as the firm of Egibi, the bankers of Babylon, or Murashu of Nippur. But perhaps the most interesting of all is the library which Ashurbanipal, one of the last of the great kings of Assyria, gathered at Nineveh, and which was found there, in the mound of Qoyunjik, partly by Sir Austen Layard, and partly by his assistant, Mr. Hormuzd Rassam.

Of course the royal library of Nineveh is nothing like so old as some of the other libraries that have been found, for Ashurbanipal reigned only a short time before the fall of Assyria; but it gives us the best idea of the books not only of Assyria, but of Babylonia as well. For the king had a great love for ancient histories, and he ordered his scribes to make copies of all the chief books of history, religion, and science in the great libraries of Babylonia, and add them to the records of his own land. So we have now thousands of the tablets which he gathered, inscribed with all kinds of ancient literature, and nearly all our knowledge of the old stories of Babylonia and the days when the world was young has come in the first instance from the book-shelves of this Assyrian king

CHAPTER VII

HERO STORIES OF THE ANCIENT EAST.

Now let me try to tell you some of the stories that have been found written in this strange arrow-headed writing on these curious clay books of the Assyrians. It is rather a pity that really none of the stories that used to be told round the fires and in the nurseries of Assyria have come down to us. We have a lot of the Egyptian stories of that kind—stories of wizards, and fairy god-mothers, and magic crocodiles and boats, and so on; and I suppose the Assyrians must have had something of that sort too. Even though they were such a terribly serious and savage nation, they must surely have had some fûn with their children once in a while and some fanciful tales to tell them. But if they had, nothing of that has come down to us. Perhaps the stories were never written down, or, if they were, they may not have been counted worth preserving in the great libraries. So we have histories of the wars of the Assyrian kings, and tales of how the world was made and how the gods dealt with men in the early days, and books of science, and books of magic, with all kinds of charms against evil spirits, and plenty of accounts of law cases, and records of tradesmen's business; but we have no real "once upon a time" stories.

Perhaps I shouldn't quite say that either, for the stories that I am going to tell you have some romance and fancy about them, too; but, compared with the wonder-tales of Ancient Egypt, they are very grim and serious business indeed, just as the Assyrian was a very grim and stern being compared with his light-hearted, laughter-loving rival on the banks of the Nile.

Our first story then comes from what is really the great Babylonian epic poem. The Assyrians copied it from Babylonian writings, but it actually belongs to the older nation, and to times long before there was an Assyrian people at all. It tells of the deeds of a great hero called Gilgamesh, who lived ever so long ago in the ancient city of Erech, and of his faithful friend Eabani—how they warred with beasts and men, how they quarrelled with a great goddess, and all the trouble that came upon them because of their quarrel. Unfortunately, the clay tablets on which the story is written are not quite perfect, and there are gaps here and there, especially at the beginning and the end; still we can make out most of the tale.

When the story, as we have it, begins, the good people of Erech are in great trouble. Evidently an enemy of some kind is fighting against them, but who he may be, we can't tell. By and by we find that a great champion called Gilgamesh is ruling over the city. Whether he was the enemy, and had conquered Erech, or whether he was the champion of the city against its foes, we don't know. Anyhow, it didn't make much difference to the people of the town ; for, conqueror or defender, Gilgamesh was a hard master. All the young men of the city he drafted into his bodyguard, all the young maidens were taken to be servants in his palace. So when his tyranny had become unbearable, the townsfolk appeal to the goddess Aruru who had created Gilgamesh, and ask her to create a champion who will be able to resist him. The goddess obligingly proceeds to do so. She washes her hands, takes a piece of clay, and out of it she models a strange creature. He is half man and half beast, his body is covered all over with hair, and he lives with

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THE HEROES COME TO KHUMBABA'S CASTLE. *(Page 62)*

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the beasts of the field, a wild, savage, invincible champion fit to encounter even the hero Gilgamesh. His name is Eabani.

Gilgamesh, however, is as wily as he is mighty. He has no intention of being drawn into a battle with so redoubtable an opponent if he can help it. So first of all he sends his chief huntsman to see if he cannot catch the half-savage Eabani in a snare. For three days the huntsman Sadu watches the strange creature going about with the beasts and drinking at their watering-places ; but he is quite unable to catch this wild man of the woods, and indeed is terrified at the very sight of him. At last he returned to his master and told him how he had fared. Then Gilgamesh fell upon another plan. He sent the huntsman away again ; but this time Sadu took with him a beautiful girl, Ukhat, and when Eabani saw her, the wild man fell in love with her at once. He forgot all about his wildness, and his mission to conquer Gilgamesh, and the wild beasts with whom he dwelt, and cared for nothing but to sit all the day long at Ukhat's feet, and to enjoy her company. When Ukhat felt that she had got complete command over her strange lover, she told him that it was time for him no longer to live with the beasts but to come to the city of Erech, and to live there in friendship with the mighty Gilgamesh; and Eabani, unable to deny her anything or to be separated from her, followed her to the town. A dream warned him against contending with Gilgamesh when the two should meet ; and so Aruru's plan failed altogether, and the two great heroes, instead of slaying one another, became friends and brothers-in-arms.

Now it befell that a great enemy from the East

threatened the town of Erech. His name was Khumbaba, and he was lord of the land of Elam, which lay east of the Euphrates. Gilgamesh and Eabani resolved to attack him in his own stronghold, and set out together on their great adventure. The way was long and difficult, and the terror of Khumbaba's name lay on all the country around, so that the hearts of the two heroes were almost discouraged at the thought of facing such a champion; but night after night, for three nights together, dreams came to Gilgamesh from the gods, telling him that he would be victor in the fight, and would come off unscathed.

So at last the long march was ended, and the brothers-in-arms arrived before the castle of the Elamite tyrant. All around it, for a vast distance on every side, there stretched a great dark wood, of wonderful grandeur, so dense that none could penetrate it save those who knew the secret paths to the dark castle in the midst; and beside the castle, monarch of the wood, grew a huge cedar, which cast its shade far and wide and sent out a sweet perfume upon the air. Indeed, the task that lay before the Babylonian champions was much like that of the Prince in "The Legend of the Briar Rose"; only it was no Sleeping Beauty who lay within the walls of the castle in the midst of the thicket, but a fierce and terrible warrior, whose roaring was like the storm, and who had never allowed an enemy to enter the wood and return alive to tell the tale. How the two heroes found their way through the wood, and how the battle raged in the dark stronghold in the shade of the weird forest, we may never know, for just at this most interesting point the tablets are broken; but the struggle ended in the victory of Gilgamesh and Eabani, and

when they emerged from the wood they carried with them the gory head of the dead Elamite tyrant.

But the great victory that they had gained was to be only the beginning of sorrows for them both. On their return they made a triumphant entry into Erech. Gilgamesh laid aside his blood-stained garments and put on white robes, burnished his armour, and placed a crown upon his head. Now, as he thus came in splendour into the city, the great goddess Ishtar, the goddess of love, beheld him, and her heart was filled with love towards this magnificent hero. She came to him and besought him to be her husband. Goddess as she was, she said, she would serve him. Splendours beyond all imagining, chariots of lapis-lazuli and gold, with golden wheels and poles and yokes of sapphire, should be his, and all the kings and great ones of the earth should bow before him. But Gilgamesh would have none of her love. He knew the miserable lot of the mortal who presumes to mate with the immortal gods, and he rejected her offer with scorn.

The insulted queen of heaven flew to her father, the chief of the gods, and craved for vengeance upon the man who had scorned her. Then the great father of the gods created a mighty and fierce bull, and sent him forth to ravage the lands of the presumptuous mortal who had defied Ishtar. But Gilgamesh and Eabani were more than a match even for this tool of divine vengeance. As the great bull Alu approached, Eabani grasped it by the tail, and his friend plunged his spear into its heart, and the bull of the gods fell down dead before the men who thus defied high heaven. And when Ishtar in her rage cursed them for the slaughter of the bull, Eabani added insult to the injury he had done; for he tore the entrails from

the dead body of the bull and threw them in the face of the goddess, crying: "Woe to thee! For I will conquer thee, and will do to thee even as I have done to him."

But Eabani had done, in his pride, what no man might do and live. A deadly stroke fell upon him from the gods. For twelve days he lingered in pain and weakness, and three times in the night there came to him a vision of fire and lightning that warned him that his death hour drew nigh. Then at last he died, and Gilgamesh, in the midst of his bitter mourning for the loss of his companion and friend, found that, even so, the vengeance of Ishtar had not run its course, for he himself was stricken with a sore sickness, so that he bore upon his body, plain for all men to see, the marks of the anger of the gods. Then the terror of death laid hold on him, and in his anguish he resolved to seek his great ancestor, Ut-napishtim, and ask for counsel and help from him. For in the days of old the gods had granted unto Ut-napishtim alone of all men to escape from death and to enjoy unending life.

Now Ut-napishtim was "the distant one," and he lived afar off at the meeting-place of the rivers, and the way to his abode was both long and dreary and full of dangers. As Gilgamesh journeyed he came to a wild mountain gorge, guarded by lions, for all the world like the road to the House Beautiful in the "Pilgrim's Progress"; but the Moon-god showed him in a dream a path across the mountains by which he might avoid this danger. Then came a still more terrible gorge of the Mountain of Mashu. Its gate was guarded by strange beings of terrible aspect, half scorpions and half men, and when Gilgamesh beheld them "his face grew dark

with fear and terror, and the wildness of their aspect robbed him of his senses." But the scorpion-men had received warning that Gilgamesh was coming, and had been ordered to pass him on his way. The monster in charge of the gate described to the hero all the dangers that lay before him, and the stage of thick darkness through which he would have to travel; but Gilgamesh refused to turn back, and so the scorpion-man opened the mountain-gate and allowed him to pass through.

For four-and-twenty hours the pilgrim marched drearily onward through the blackness, "and the darkness was thick and there was no light." And then at last he came out into the blessed sunlight again, and before his eyes stood a wonderful tree.

> "Precious stones it bore as fruit,
> Branches hung from it which were beautiful to behold.
> The top of the tree was lapis-lazuli,
> And it was laden with fruit which dazzled the eye of him who beheld."

This wonderful tree was surrounded with others which were also laden with precious stones; but Gilgamesh could not stop to gather. He was too eager to get to the sea and cross it, to find Ut-napishtim.

But when he came to the sea-shore, the Princess Sabitu, who ruled over the coast and dwelt in a palace by the shore, refused to see him, and shut her doors upon him. As Gilgamesh could not cross without her advice, he demanded entrance, and threatened to break down the door if it was not opened. So at last he got an interview with the princess, and asked her to tell him how he might cross the sea. She warned him that it was a hopeless task to attempt, for these were Waters of Death which none but a god had ever crossed; but when he would not be denied, she told

him of a pilot, Arad-Ea, who might be able to help him. At last Gilgamesh found the pilot, and succeeded in persuading him to risk the voyage; and when they had equipped their vessel with new and strong tackle, they set out on their perilous journey. The voyage was one of a month and five days, but the hero and his companion accomplished it in three days, though not without great risks and exertions.

At last they landed on the shore where the two immortals, Ut-napishtim and his wife, dwelt apart from mankind. They saw Gilgamesh coming, and wondered that any man should have crossed the Waters of Death; but Gilgamesh, still sitting in his boat, told the whole story to his ancestor, and asked eagerly how he might escape the death which had fallen upon Eabani. But Ut-napishtim's answer was sad and hopeless. "Death comes to all," he said, "and no man can escape from it."

> "As long as houses are built,
> And as long as brethren quarrel,
> And as long as there is hatred in the land,
> And as long as the river beareth its waters to the sea."

No man, he said, might know the day of his death.

> "The Annunaki, the great gods, decree fate,
> And with them Mammetum, the maker of destiny,
> And they determine death and life,
> But the days of death are not known."

Not unnaturally, Gilgamesh asked his relative how it came to pass, if all this were true, that he had escaped from the doom which, as he said, came upon all men. In answer, Ut-napishtim tells the story of the Deluge, which we shall hear when we come to talk of how the Babylonians and Assyrians regarded their gods. He told how he and his wife had been saved from the

flood which overwhelmed the world because of its wickedness, and how, when the god who sent the flood saw that they had escaped, he decreed that they should no longer be like other men, but should be immortal like the gods, and dwell apart from men. All the time of this long story, Gilgamesh sits in his boat, sick and weary, and unable to stir. Ut-napishtim's sympathy was moved at the sight of his misery, and he bade him sleep; and at last sleep came upon the hero "like a storm." Then, while he slept, the wife of Ut-napishtim gave him magic food which healed him of his disease; and when he wakened, they told him what had been done to him, and added that, though they could not keep him from death, they knew of a magic plant which would renew his youth whenever he ate of it.

So Gilgamesh and his pilot set out again on a long journey in search of this wonderful plant which has the power of eternal youth. At last they find it, and Gilgamesh, in his joy, cries out that he will carry it back to Erech with him, and so be for ever young. Then, as the travellers journeyed, they came to a fountain of cool and sweet water, and Gilgamesh stooped down to drink; but, as he drank, a demon in the shape of a serpent darted upon him and wrenched the plant out of his hand. There was no regaining it, and with bitter sorrow Gilgamesh had to return to Erech, healed, indeed, of his disease, but only too well aware that for him there was no escape from the death which must claim him as it had claimed his friend Eabani.

After a while he grew more reconciled to his fate; but there still lay upon his spirit a great desire to know the secrets of the world beyond the grave. So

he asked god after god to call Eabani back from the dead that he might speak with his friend. At last Nergal, the god of the dead, consented. "He opened the ground, and caused the spirit of Eabani to come forth from the earth like a wind." You remember how King Saul, the night before his death in battle, besought the witch of Endor to bring back Samuel from the dead, and how the shade of the old prophet warned the king that he must die : "To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me." This picture of Gilgamesh and his dead friend reminds one almost exactly of that scene ; and Eabani has no more comfort for his old comrade than Samuel had for Saul. Gilgamesh cried to him, "Tell me, my friend, tell me ; tell me the appearance of the land which thou hast seen"; but Eabani answered, "I cannot tell thee, my friend, I cannot tell thee." The reality was too terrible and dreary for words, and there was nothing to do but sit down and weep over such a fate. Only there was one thing : if the man who fell in battle received due and honourable burial, his lot beyond was better than that of him who was left unburied.

> "But he whose corpse remains in the field,
> As you and I have seen,
> His spirit has no rest in the earth.
> The one whose spirit is not cared for by anyone,
> As you and I have seen,
> He is consumed by gnawing hunger, by a longing for food,
> The refuse of the streets he is obliged to eat."

It was cold comfort, but it was all that Eabani had to give. Man must die, and Gilgamesh cannot escape. The best he can do is to provide for his proper burial when death does overtake him. Then, at least, he will not starve in the other world.

So the long story of Gilgamesh closes in rather a

lame and unsatisfactory fashion. There may have been more of it, to tell us how the hero came to his end; but we have no more as yet, and the twelve tablets leave us with nothing but the sad thought that the hope of immortal life is only a delusion, for the plant of eternal youth slips out of one's hand in the very moment when it seems to have been secured.

CHAPTER VIII

HERO STORIES OF THE ANCIENT EAST—*continued*

In the British Museum there lies another set of tablets, from the royal library of King Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, which tells us the story of a rash mortal who tried to fly up to heaven and see the abodes of the gods, and of what befell him. Unfortunately, the tablets are very much broken and destroyed, so that large parts of the story are lost. When it begins, the hero Etana is in great distress. He is expecting the birth of a son; but his wife is in sore sickness, and he is afraid that both she and her son may perish. So he consults the Sun-god Shamash, and the god tells him of a wonderful plant, growing among the mountains, which will bring safety and health to both mother and son. Etana goes in search of it, and no doubt finds it and secures his wife and child from harm. In his search he was helped by his friend the Eagle, who carried him over the mountains.

But in some way or other that we cannot make out, Etana, while engaged in warfare against a hostile city, had managed to offend Ishtar, who, for a lady who was the goddess of love, seems to have been

very ill-natured and ready to take offence. She laid a cunning plot to avenge herself upon him; and his friend, the Eagle, was made the innocent accomplice of the goddess in her cruel design. Meaning no evil, the Eagle suggested to Etana that they might fly together up into the heavens. Etana was nothing loath; he clung to the great bird, and it flapped its huge pinions and sailed up into the sky. As they rose above the earth, the gates of heaven opened, and as Etana saw the glory within, and the great throne of God, he threw himself upon his face in terror.

But the Eagle was troubled with no fears, and wished to go farther still. He turned to his trembling companion and reassured him.

"My friend, lift up thy face,
Come, and let me carry thee to the heaven of Anu.
On my breast place thy breast,
On my pinion place thy palms,
On my side place thy side."

So once more the two wheeled out into the air and flew upwards through the sky to the higher heavens. For two hours they flew, and then the Eagle said to Etana, "Look down, my friend, and see how the earth appears, and the sea." Etana looked down into the depths, and answered, "The earth appears no bigger than a mountain, and the sea has shrunk to a pool." For two hours more they resumed their flight, and then the Eagle said again, "Look, my friend, how the earth appears," and Etana looked down and answered, "The sea is a mere belt round the earth." Then for another two hours they flew, and when the Eagle said once more, "Look, my friend, how the earth appears," Etana answered, "The sea is a mere gardener's ditch."





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So at last they came to the gate of the second heaven, and there they rested for a while.

But the Eagle, the unconscious tool of the anger of Ishtar, was not satisfied yet. There was still a third heaven to reach, and he would not be content until he had placed his friend by the side of the great goddess. He said:

"Come, my friend, let me carry thee to Ishtar.
With Ishtar, the mistress of the gods, thou shalt dwell.
In the glory of Ishtar, the mistress of the gods, thou shalt sit.
On my side place thy side,
On my pinion thy palms."

Etana was only too easily persuaded, and they mounted higher and higher till the earth seemed only as large as a garden plot and the ocean no bigger than a courtyard. Then at last, Etana's heart failed him, and he began to implore the eagle to descend, but it was too late. The rash voyagers through space had come into the sphere where Ishtar ruled, and her vengeance fell upon them. Headlong they dropped from heaven, with lightning speed, until at last they crashed to the earth.

In all likelihood Etana was killed by his fall, for in the story of Gilgamesh he is mentioned by Eabani as one of those who are dwelling in the dark and miserable world of the dead; but the Eagle was reserved for an almost more wretched fate. He had a feud with the Serpent, which was under the protection of Shamash, the Sun-god, and an opportunity came to him of eating the Serpent's young when they had newly come out of the egg. One of the young birds, "who was endowed with much wisdom," warned him against such an action. "Do not eat, O my father, for it is a net of Shamash that is laid for thee.

The snare of Shamash will fall upon thee, and catch thee." But the Eagle was too intent on his opportunity to listen to the wisdom of his child. "He swooped down and ate the young of the Serpent."

Then, in anger, the Serpent went before the throne of the Sun-god and appealed to him for vengeance upon the evil-doer. He described how his nest with his young ones was set in a tree, and how the Eagle had swooped down upon it and devoured the young. "Behold, O Shamash, the evil he hath done me. Help, O Shamash!" Then Shamash, the Judge of all the Earth, gave wily counsel unto the Serpent. "Go into the mountain," he said, "and you will find the carcass of an ox that is dead. Enter into its body, and hide thyself in its entrails. Then when the birds of the air swoop down upon it, the Eagle will come with them. When he hath entered into the ox, seize thou him by his wing, tear off his wings and his talons, pull him in pieces and cast him into a pit, that he may die the death from hunger and thirst."

Then the Serpent departed from before the face of Shamash, and went into the mountain, and did according to the word of the god; for he tore open the body of a wild ox, and entered into it, and took up his dwelling in its entrails. When they saw the dead ox, all the birds of the air swooped down to eat of its flesh; but at first the Eagle would not come. He suspected a snare, and hovered aloof. At last, however, his appetite overcame his prudence. "Then the Eagle opened his mouth and spake unto his young: 'Come, let us swoop down, and let us also eat of the flesh of this wild ox!'" The same young eaglet, "who was endowed with much wisdom," tried to dissuade him. "O my father," he said, "the Serpent

lurks in the flesh of this wild ox." But the Eagle would not listen; he swooped down on the carcass, and began to tear at the choice parts of the flesh. Then the Serpent seized him by the wing. In terror the Eagle begged for mercy, and offered a ransom for his life; but the Serpent told him that if he released him, the anger of the Sun-god would be against them both.

> "So he tore off his wings, his pinions, and his talons,
> He pulled him in pieces, and cast him into a pit. . . .
> And he died a death from hunger and thirst."

Now we come to a story which has a curious resemblance to a famous tale of modern times. No doubt you have all read Wandering Willie's Tale in "Redgauntlet," one of the most wonderful of short stories, and you remember how Piper Steenie went down into the world of the dead to get his receipt from Sir Robert Redgauntlet, and how his old friend Dougal MacCallum, who opened the gate for him, warned him to take nothing from any of the dead men who spoke to him, "neither meat, drink, or siller, except just the receipt that is your ain"; and how when he went into the hall he saw all the ghosts of the persecutors, "Earlshall, with Cameron's blude on his hand," and "bluidy Mackenzie," and "Claverhouse, as beautiful as when he lived, with his long, dark, curled locks streaming down over his laced buff-coat, and the left hand always on his right spule-blade, to hide the wound that the silver bullet had made." They offered the piper meat and drink, but he would not touch them, for he knew that if he did he would be forced to stay with the dead for ever. They offered him bagpipes to play them a tune; but he saw that the

chanter was white-hot steel, and would not touch it; and at last he got his receipt and escaped from his ghastly company.

Well, now listen to this story, first told perhaps some 5,000 years before Sir Walter wrote Wandering Willie's Tale, of the fisherman who broke the wings of the South Wind, and went before the gods to answer for it. It befell that Adapa, the son of the great god Ea, was fishing one day that he might provide fish for his father's house. Then came the South Wind like a bird with mighty pinions, and with the flap of its great wings it overset Adapa's boat and plunged him into the dwelling-place of the fish. But Adapa's heart and arm were strong, and in his anger at being overset he fought with the South Wind and broke its wings. Then for seven days the South Wind ceased to blow across the world. Therefore Anu, the great god of heaven, called to his messenger Ilabrat, and asked him: "Why has the South Wind ceased for seven days to blow across the world?" And Ilabrat answered him: "My lord! Adapa, the son of Ea, has broken the wings of the South Wind."

Therefore Anu in anger summoned Adapa to come up into heaven and appear before him to answer for his act. So Ea the great god advised his son to obey the summons of Anu, and to humble himself before the gatekeepers of heaven that they might intercede for him; but above all, there was one point in which he was to be on his guard. "When thou comest before Anu they will offer thee food of death. Do not eat. They will offer thee waters of death. Do not drink. They will offer thee a garment. Put it on. They will offer thee oil. Anoint thyself. The order that I give thee do not neglect." So the herald of heaven came,

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ADAPA BREAKS THE WINGS OF THE SOUTH WIND (Page 74)

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and Ea delivered up Adapa his son to answer before the throne of God.

Now when they came to the gate of heaven, the two Watchers of the Gate, Tammuz and Gishzida, were on guard. But Adapa humbled himself before them, and with wise words prevailed with them, so that they brought him before King Anu, and stood ready to intercede for him. Then said Anu: "Come, Adapa, why hast thou broken the wings of the South Wind?" And Adapa answered: "My lord! For the house of my lord Ea I was fishing in the midst of the sea. The waters lay still around me, when the South Wind began to blow, and forced me underneath. Into the dwelling of the fish it drove me; and in the anger of my heart I broke the wings of the South Wind." Then the two Watchers of the Gate interceded with Anu, and the anger of the great god was appeased, and he pardoned Adapa.

"But," said he, "what shall we do now that an impure mortal has seen the courts of heaven? We can do nothing but make him like unto ourselves. Offer him food of *life*, that he may eat of it." They brought it to him, but he did not eat. Waters of *life* they brought him, but he did not drink. A garment they brought him. He put it on. Oil they brought him. He anointed himself. Therefore Anu the great god looked at him and lamented over him. "Come, Adapa, why didst thou not eat and drink? Now thou canst not live." And Adapa answered: "Ea, my lord, commanded me not to eat and not to drink." You see the supreme god had been kindlier than Ea expected, and instead of offering bread and water of death, had offered bread and water of life; and so through his father's too great caution poor Adapa missed the chance

of becoming immortal like the gods. Or perhaps Ea himself was jealous lest his son should become equal with him, and tricked Adapa into refusing the food that would make him live for ever. Anyhow, the story has the same moral as both the Gilgamesh and the Etana stories, and the stout-hearted fisherman, like the others, finds that between God and man there is a gulf that can never be bridged. But it is curious to see how the ancient Babylonian and the great Scottish storyteller hit upon the same idea.

CHAPTER IX

THE GODS AND THEIR TEMPLES

LIKE nearly all the peoples of the ancient world, the Assyrians and the Babylonians were very religious in their own way; and it is a way that ought to be very interesting to us, because, as you know, the Hebrews came originally from Babylonia, and a great many of the Babylonian ways of thinking and speaking about God are reflected in the Hebrew religion, and so have come to influence even our own thoughts about God at the present time. Some of the old legends are remarkably like some of the early parts of the Old Testament; and when we come to the story of the Flood, you will see that it is almost exactly the same, in its outline, as the story that is told in Genesis, though the details, of course, are different.

The one thing in which both Assyrians and Babylonians differed from the Hebrews very widely was the question of one God or many gods. As you know, the very first thing that a Hebrew was taught was the sentence, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our

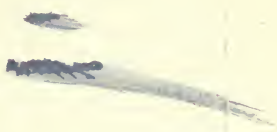


PLATE 14



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THE BATTERING-RAM IN ACTION (*p.* 47)

From the marble slab in the British Museum

God, the Lord is One!" No other gods were to be allowed beside Jehovah; nor were the Hebrews allowed to make any representations of God whatsoever. On the other hand, the Babylonians had a perfect crowd of gods. Anu the god of heaven, Ea the god of the deep, Enlil the god of spirits, Marduk, or Bel-Marduk, who was originally the city-god of Babylon, but became at last the supreme god, Ishtar the goddess of love, Nergal the god of the dead, Allat the goddess of the underworld, and so on. And when the Assyrians set up for themselves, they converted all this troop of gods into Assyrian gods simply by making Ashur, their own national god, the commander-in-chief of the lot. Nearly every town of any importance had its own god; but latterly Marduk of Babylon came to be almost supreme, and even the greatest kings of Assyria never thought their empire secure until they had gone to the temple of Marduk at Babylon, which was then in their power, and "taken the hands of Bel," as they said.

So let me try to tell you shortly what the great temple of Bel, or Marduk, at Babylon was like. Long ago an old Greek traveller and historian, called Herodotus, paid a visit to Babylon, and he has left us a description of the temple of Belus, as he calls him. He tells us that the enclosure of the temple was a great square of 400 yards each way. In the midst of this square rose a huge tower, built in stages. The lowermost stage was a solid platform which raised the building up above the level of the plain. Then came stage after stage, each a little smaller than the one below it, till at last, on the seventh stage, the smallest and highest of all, stood the shrine of the great god. Each of these stages, as we learn from other sources,

was painted a special colour of its own—the first white, the second black, the third sky-blue, and so on. The seventh was gilded, or plated with gold, and in the shrine on its summit there stood nothing but a couch for the god to rest on, and a table, both of them of pure gold. A sloping roadway ran round the tower from stage to stage, so that the processions of priests could gradually climb up the great tower to the shrine on the top. Below the tower, on the one side, stood another temple, with a golden statue of Belus, and two altars for sacrifice.

During the last few years a German explorer, Dr. Koldewey, has been excavating the ruins of Babylon, and he has dug out what remains of this huge temple that Herodotus saw. Of course, only the lower parts of it are left ; but there is enough to show us that the old Greek described very faithfully the actual appearance of the temple. The lower part of the great tower is there, with the sloping way leading up to it, and on the south side there is another great temple, just as Herodotus describes. The Babylonians called the tower Etemenanki, "the foundation-stone of heaven and earth," and the temple beside it they called Esagila, "the house of the high head." The German explorer does not think that the storeys of the tower grew smaller the higher they were; but it seems impossible that such a building should have been built of brick in any other way.

We all remember from our very early days how men built the tower of Babel, "whose top may reach unto heaven." Well, this is the tower of Babel, and it was no small one. The foot of it measured about 300 feet in length on each side, and probably it was quite 300 feet or more in height. I suppose the idea of making it

so high was just what the Bible says—that the worshippers might get nearer to heaven by it; and that the god might perhaps come down to the top of the tower and meet with men there, so that the tower would be a kind of stepping-stone between heaven and earth.

All over the land, wherever there was a town, there was a temple to the god of the town, and always one of the features of the temple was a tower like this of Babel, bigger or smaller according to the size and wealth of the city that built it and the fame of the city-god, but much the same as Etemenanki in general appearance. The Babylonians and Assyrians were great folks for religious services. It was they who started the idea of a Sabbath, and who gave us the name for it. You know how strictly the Sabbath used to be kept in our grandfathers' and great-grandfathers' days. Well, that was nothing compared to the strictness of the Sabbath in Mesopotamia. No work could be done at all on that day. Even the king had to be content with a cold dinner, for no cooking was allowed; and he could not change his clothes, or wear white, or drive in his chariot, or issue a decree. And, most extraordinary and most silly of all, even the doctor was not allowed to give medicine to the sick on the Sabbath. Of course it was from these old laws that the Jews took their ideas about the strictness of the Sabbath, and I think when they carried things to such a ridiculous excess it was time for Jesus to tell them that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

Every day in their temples they had sacrifices, just as the Jews had. These were of all kinds—oxen, sheep, kids, doves, where blood had to be shed; fruit, vegetables, bread, wine, and oil, in other cases. On special

festival days, of which there was a great number, the ordinary sacrifices would be increased many times over. For their services they had prayer-books and hymn-books; and the curious thing was that the prayers and hymns were written, not in the language that they used every day, but in the old language of the people who inhabited the land long before. They considered that this old language—Sumerian they called it—was the only one worthy of being used in the service of the gods, and so they had to give a translation along with the hymns, and even directions as to how the difficult words should be pronounced. It seems very silly; but it is no worse than using Latin, as is sometimes done in services still.

One other thing I must tell you about the religion of these old folks before we go on to the stories of their gods, and that is what they thought about the other world to which the souls of men went after death. The Egyptians had rather cheery and happy ideas about the other world, though they had some wild and gloomy ideas too; but to the Babylonians and Assyrians it was all gloom together. Never had any people a more miserable and hopeless idea of the life after death than they. Heaven they had no thought of at all. Here is the description of the other world given in one of their stories, in which we are told how the goddess of love went down into the abode of the dead:

"Upon the Land of No-return, the region of darkness,
Set Ishtar, the daughter of Sin, her mind:
Upon the House of Gloom, the seat of Irkalla,
Upon the house whose entrance has no exit,
Upon the path whose way hath no return,
Upon the house whose enterers are deprived of light,
Where dust is their nourishment, mud their food;
Light they see not, in darkness they dwell,
Clothed also like a bird, in a dress of feathers
Upon the door and the bolt the dust hath blown."

Can you imagine anything more uncomfortable and miserable? Now, it was from that old idea that the Hebrews took most of their thoughts about life after death, and their gloomy outlook upon the future, so that they talked of going down to the pit. And it was not till Jesus Christ had come and taught people that the other world was the Heavenly Father's House, that men really got away from this grim and gloomy Mesopotamian thought of it.

CHAPTER X

LEGENDS OF THE GODS

Now let me try to tell you some of the stories which were handed down in these lands from the very earliest days, and became part of the religion of both Babylonians and Assyrians. First comes the story of the beginning of all things and the way in which the world and the heavens came into being.

In the beginning, says the legend, the heavens were unnamed, and the earth bore no name; but the ocean was the mother of all things, and brought forth everything that existed. Not even the gods had come into being, and nothing had been decided as to how things should be arranged. Then at last the great gods were born, among them Anu, the god of heaven, and Ea, the god of the deep, and Bel, or Marduk, the creator. But the dragon or demon of the deep, Tiamat, the mother of disorder, rebelled against the very idea of gods and their rule, and resolved, with her allies, to make war upon them and destroy them. So she gathered together all the powers of evil and prepared them for the fight. She created all kinds of evil mon-

sters—giant serpents, sharp of tooth, armed with stings, having their whole bodies filled with poison; dragons, shining with a terrible light, and of enormous size; fierce, raging dogs; serpent-men, fish-men, and scorpion-men; and with this hideous army she set forth to attack the throne of the gods.

The gods were greatly disturbed, and not a little frightened, over this threat to their dominion. First of all Anu, the god of heaven, went out to stop Tiamat, the dragon, in her course; but at the sight of her dreadful visage his heart failed him, and he fled. Then Ea, the god of the deep, went out, and fared no better than his predecessor. Then the assembly of the gods, in terror, sent out Marduk as their champion. Like a true son of the East, as he was, he made a bargain with the other gods before he would take on the task of delivering them, and made them promise that if he bound Tiamat and saved them, they would all be subject to his authority. They willingly agreed, and when the formal challenge to war had been sent, the whole company of the gods celebrated the occasion by getting royally drunk.

> "They ate bread, they drank wine.
> The sweet wine took away their senses.
> They became drunk, and their bodies swelled up."

Then Marduk prepared himself for the fight. He mounted his chariot, which was drawn by four fiery horses, and with the thunderbolt in his hand he drove to meet the dragon, while the seven winds followed behind him. At last he came in sight of Tiamat, and the god and the demon stood face to face. Then he challenged her to combat.

> "Stand up! I and thou, come let us fight."

When the dragon heard the challenge, she shrieked wild and loud, and advanced to the conflict. As the two met, Tiamat opened her mouth to spit out her incantations against her enemy; but Marduk took advantage of her movement. He drove the wind into her open mouth so that she could not close it. Then he hurled her down and plunged his spear of lightning into her, tearing through her heart, and trampled upon her carcass.

The defeat of the dragon terrified her army of monsters. They all turned to flee, but Marduk was too swift for them. He captured them all, and put them into his great net; while, most important of all, he tore from one of them the tablets of fate and fastened them on his own breast, so that henceforth the fate of all things lies with the gods. Then Marduk took the dead body of the dragon. He split it into two, as one splits a gutted fish, and the one half of the body he fixed as a covering for the heavens, fastening it with a bolt, and setting a watchman, so that the waters above the firmament should not come down. Then from the other half of the body he fashioned the earth. He set up the stars in constellations, and divided the year into months, and he fastened large gates at each side of heaven, secured with bolts; and out of one of these gates the sun goes in the morning, and into the other he returns at night. Then, having given rules to the moon for the ordering of the night, and created plants and animals, he created man. Little wonder that, after such a piece of work, the great gods all gathered round him and praised him, and that mankind in particular was enjoined never to forget Marduk,

> "Who created mankind out of kindness to them,
> The merciful one, with whom is the power of giving life.
> May his deeds remain and never be forgotten
> By humanity, created by his hands."

Such is the Mesopotamian story of the Creation. Our next legend takes us on a little further, to a time when men, as in the Bible story, have become wicked, and when the gods resolve to destroy them by a flood. You remember how, when Gilgamesh asked his ancestor Ut-napishtim how it came about that he was immortal like the gods while all other men must needs die, Ut-napishtim told him in answer the story of the Flood. Now this is the tale Ut-napishtim told: "I will reveal to thee, O Gilgamesh," he said, "the hidden word, and the decision of the gods will I declare unto thee." The city of Shurippak, on the Euphrates, where he dwelt, had grown wicked, and the gods decided to bring a rainstorm upon it. But the god Ea had mercy upon his servant Ut-napishtim, and when he left the council of the gods he came to the hut where Ut-napishtim dwelt and spoke to him in a vision. Thus he spake:

"O reed-hut, reed-hut! O wall, wall!
O reed-hut, hear! O wall, understand!
Thou man of Shurippak, son of Ubara-tutu,
Pull down thy house, build a ship,
Forsake thy possessions, take heed for thy life!
And bring up living seed of every kind into the ship.
As for the ship which thou shalt build,
Well planned must be its dimensions,
Its breadth and its length shall bear proportion each to each,
And thou shalt launch it on the ocean."

Then Ut-napishtim promised to do as the god commanded him, but asked how he was to explain his action to his townsfolk; and Ea ordered him to warn them that he was going down to the deep to dwell with Ea, his lord, because destruction was coming.

"Over you a rainstorm will come—
Men, birds, and beasts will perish."

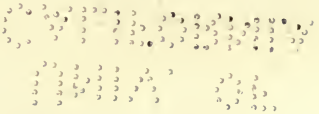


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PLATE 15

CREATION TABLETS (*p.* 81)

From the inscribed tablets in the British Museum



So Ut-napishtim built his ship as Ea had commanded. It was a great square box, 180 feet broad and the same in height, and it contained 63 rooms. Like Noah's Ark, it was coated with pitch both outside and in, and well provided with all kinds of stores. Then he loaded it with all his household goods and made his family go on board, and drove in beasts of all kinds; but he remained outside himself, watching for the first sign of the coming storm.

"When the time came
For the lord of the whirlwind to rain down destruction,
I gazed at the earth.
I was terrified at its sight,
I entered the ship, and closed the door."

Then came the storm.

"Upon the first appearance of the dawn,
There arose from the horizon dark clouds,
Within which Ramman caused his thunder to resound."

The destroying gods came marching at the head of their battalions of storm clouds; thunder, lightning, whirlwind and rain were let loose upon the earth, and for seven days there was nothing but wild turmoil and destruction. Men were appalled, so that they forgot all natural affections; and even the gods, who had brought on all the mischief, were affrighted at what they had done.

"Brother does not look after brother,
Men care not for one another. In the heavens
Even the gods are terrified at the storm.
They take refuge in the highest heaven.
The gods cowered like dogs at the edge of the heavens."

Now when the mischief was beyond repair, the gods began to feel that they had gone too far. Ishtar, the goddess of love, and the mother goddess of mankind, blamed herself bitterly for having consented to the

destruction of her own creatures; and all the other gods, except Bel, who remained hard-hearted, sat down and wept along with her; but they could do nothing to help. On the seventh day the storm died down, and Ut-napishtim ventured to look out. There was nothing but a wide desolation of muddy water on every hand, and he sat down dumbfounded and wept.

In another twenty-four hours, however, the waters began to go back, and an island appeared. It was the top of the mountain "Nisir," which means "protection" or "salvation," and here the great ship grounded and remained fast. For six days she remained in the same position, and on the morning of the seventh Ut-napishtim thought it was time to find out whether he could venture to leave his ark. First, he sent out a dove, which flew about but could find no resting-place, and so returned. Next he sent out a swallow, but it fared no better than the dove. Then he sent out a raven, which found that the waters had decreased, and waded cautiously about in the mud, but did not return. So Ut-napishtim saw that it was now safe to leave his ship, and he made a great sacrifice of sweet-smelling woods and incense upon the top of the mountain.

The gods, who in these ancient stories are by no means very dignified folks, were attracted at once by the fine smell of the sacrifice, and gathered "like flies," as the story rudely says, around it. Ishtar swore solemnly that she could never forget these days, and said that Bel alone of all the gods should have no share of the sacrifice, because the destruction of mankind was his work. Bel, however, had no intention of being shut out. He came in great indignation to ask who had spoiled his plan and saved some of the

hated mortals from destruction; but Ea made a long speech, telling him how foolish he had been, and telling him that a flood was the very last thing he should have brought upon the earth. Anything—lions, tigers, famine, or pestilence—would have been better than a flood. So at last even Bel came to his senses, and, seeing that he could not make a better of it, decided that since Ut-napishtim and his wife had thus been saved, they must now be made immortal, like the gods, and must henceforth dwell apart from all other men. So it was done, and the immortal man and wife were sent to dwell far off at the meeting-place of the rivers, where Gilgamesh found them.

Such, then, is the story of the Babylonian Noah and his Ark and the Flood. As you cannot have helped seeing, it bears a very close resemblance indeed to the story of Noah and the Flood in the Bible. In fact, there can be no doubt that both of these stories are really different forms of an old story telling of some great disaster which overwhelmed the land between the rivers in very ancient days, long before the Hebrews had separated, under Abraham, from the Chaldeans.

The last story that I have to tell you about the gods takes us down to that most uncomfortable home of the dead that Gilgamesh wanted to learn about, and tells us what happened to a great goddess when she went down there in search of her husband. It is a story that you find in all kinds of different forms among the ancient European nations. Sometimes it is called the story of Venus and Adonis. Then in another form it is the story of Ceres and Proserpine, or, as the Greeks called them, Demeter and Persephone. And in another form still it is the story of Orpheus and

Eurydice. But always, whatever form it may take, it tells of someone going down into the dark underworld, and someone else going to bring the loved one back again to light and happiness. And all the stories are just parables, which put in a fanciful way the early poetical ideas of men about the seasons. When the loved one goes down into the shades, that is the waning of the year, the falling of the leaf, and the coming of winter. Then when the rescuer goes down to bring the lost one back again, and all life comes to a standstill on earth, that is the dead season of winter, when nothing grows. And when the wanderers return to light and life again, that is the return of spring, with the coming of the buds and the blossoms, and the nesting of birds, and all the brightness after the gloom.

Now this story of Ishtar in the underworld is just another of these stories of the seasons; but its great importance is that it shows us what these ancient peoples of Mesopotamia thought about the world beyond death. Ishtar, the goddess of love—who, as you can see from the other stories you have read, was rather a changeable lady, though a very great and powerful one—was married to another divine being named Tammuz. After a while she grew tired of her husband, and destroyed him, but before long her heart repented of the evil she had done, and she resolved to go down to the underworld in search of her lost husband. So she set out for the Land of Aralu, the Land of No-return, where Allat, the goddess of the dead, and her husband Nergal, the god of the dead, reign over their gloomy kingdom and their miserable, shadowy subjects.

Now, when Ishtar came to the gate of the Land of No-return, behold! it was barred and bolted. There-

fore she lifted up her voice and called to the watchman at the gate: "Ho, warder! Open! Open thy gate that I may enter. If thou dost not open, I will smash the door, and break the bolt, and force open the portals, and I will raise up the dead and let them loose to devour the living, until the dead are far more in number than the living." The poor watchman, in a great state of anxiety, terrified to let her in for fear of the anger of Allat, and terrified to keep her out, tried to pacify her by telling her that he would go and mention her name to Queen Allat. And when Allat heard of the coming of Ishtar she was grieved in her heart, because she knew that as long as Ishtar was in the underworld there must be death on earth. "I must weep," she said, "for the husbands who must leave their wives, and for the wives who are torn from their husbands, and for the children who are snatched away before their time." But she could not deny entrance to the great goddess.

Therefore she spake to the Warder of the Gate. "Go, watchman, open thy gate. Deal with her according to the ancient laws." Then the watchman opened the gate and bowed low before the Lady of Heaven. "Enter," he said, "O mistress, welcome to the nether world. The Lady of the Land of No-return greets thee." Then he led Ishtar through the first gate; but as she passed he stretched forth his hand and plucked the great crown from her head. In anger she turned upon him: "Why, O warder, dost thou dare to remove the great crown from my head?" But the warder answered: "Enter, O Lady; such are the laws of Allat."

Then they passed in silence to the second gate, and as the goddess set her foot across its threshold, he

took from her her earrings; and, as they passed gate after gate, her necklace, her robe, her girdle of precious stones were stripped from her one by one. And ever she asked the same question, and ever the warder answered grimly, "Enter, O Lady; such are the laws of Allat." Then at length as she passed the seventh gate, her last garment was taken away from her, and stripped and bare Ishtar entered into the presence of Queen Allat, and stood before her throne. And Allat arose in anger, and bade her messenger, Namtar, smite Queen Ishtar with loathly disease in all parts of her body.

Meanwhile on earth all things mourned by reason of the absence of Ishtar. No plants sprang forth, no children were born, fertility of all kinds ceased, and all the world was bare and dead. Therefore the gods took counsel together how they might bring the life-giver back to earth again; and Ea, the all-wise, created a messenger, Uddushu-namir, and bade him go down to the kingdom of the dead to bring Ishtar back to earth. And he gave him words of power by which the seven gates would open to him, and bade him speak before Queen Allat the name of the great gods, and command her in their name to grant the waters of life unto Ishtar.

So it befell that Uddushu-namir came before Allat and called upon the name of the great gods. And it came to pass that when Allat heard him she was much displeased; for she knew that she might not resist the request of the great gods. Therefore in her wrath she smote upon her breast and bit her fingers. Then she arose and cursed Uddushu-namir with a terrible curse; yet in spite of her cursing the order of the great gods had to be obeyed. So Allat spake unto Namtar her

messenger: "Go, Namtar, break the prison, smash the threshold, and destroy the door-posts. Bring forth the goddess and place her on a golden throne; and sprinkle her with the waters of life, and take her from me that I may be rid of her."

So it was done as Allat had commanded. The waters of life were poured over Ishtar, and her disease was taken away. Then, as she passed each gate, her garments and her jewels were given back to her one by one, until at the last her great crown was set upon her head once more, and Queen Ishtar came back to earth again in all her beauty. Then did the earth yield her increase as before, and the wilderness did bring forth and bud, and the desert rejoiced and blossomed as the rose.

Curiously enough, this story of Ishtar and Tammuz became a great favourite, not only with the Babylonians and Assyrians, but with the Jews as well. In the prophecy written by Ezekiel, he tells us of a vision that he had of all the evil things that were being done by the Jews, and the abominations that were allowed even in the Temple. And among them he tells us that in the north porch of the Temple there sat women weeping for Tammuz—no doubt taking part in some religious ceremony connected with this old story of Ishtar and her journey to the underworld in search of her lost husband.

* * * * *

Such, then, were the lands, the homes, the customs, and some of the beliefs of one of the greatest peoples that the old world ever knew. Very wonderful the men of Assyria were—brave, strong, skilful in many crafts and wise in many ways. And yet, somehow I don't think that anyone, even of those who have

studied and admired them most, ever liked them. You can't help liking the old Egyptian, with his cheery, laughter-loving nature; but the Assyrian is forbidding and stern as his own beliefs about his gods. Yet he did his work, too. One of the great prophets of Israel once said that the Assyrian was God's axe and saw to shape the nations to the great divine purpose; and I think we may just leave it at that. He did the rough-hewing of the world in those early days, and he did it roughly and cruelly, as such work is apt to be done; but no doubt he had his own place and his own importance in the advance of the human race, and though we may not love him, we cannot forget that, after all, we owe him no small debt.

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